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THE MARQUIS D'ARGENSON

René Louis de Voyer
Marquis d'Argenson
Ministre d'

THE MARQUIS D'ARGENSON: A STUDY IN CRITICISM; BEING THE STANHOPE ESSAY: OXFORD, 1893

BY

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THE MARQUIS D'ARGENSON.

I.

1630–1721.

D'Argenson's Ancestry.

THERE are occasions when the craft of the critic becomes especially delightful, and at the same time especially dangerous. Delightful, when the material in which he works is new and unessayed; dangerous, from the besetting temptation to be content with accredited methods, and to neglect that watchful regard to the texture of the clay, which alone can suggest the conditions of successful treatment. Of such delicate fabric is a man made, here and there. It is as if for a moment the common matter had been thrown aside wearily, as if Nature, when she wrought him, had been toying with an inspiration, sometimes happy, often unhappy. In dealing with such a man, the critic will proceed very patiently and tenderly. He will beware of presenting him, morally or otherwise, in the light of the prevailing prejudice; nor will he erect his own provincialities of opinion as a final

measure of wisdom or worth. Rather will he let the man go his own way and tell his own tale, content if he may but follow and hear and understand, without sitting in the gate to judge him.

That criticism, in the case of the Marquis d'Argenson,[1] has not always been chastened to this wholesome deference, there will be occasion to notice at a later date. We may remark at once how necessary it was. D'Argenson was indeed no ordinary man. The character with which destiny had endowed him was but poorly adapted to the social medium in which it was to move; and to the great world where moral commonplace is law, he was a stranger. He dwelt, as such men do, in a little world of his own creating, peopled with his own pleasures and his own pains. His only critic was his conscience: himself was his sternest judge: and he knew no tribunal but the midnight silence, when the glow was dying on the hearth. He was an original, in short, and as an original he must be treated.

When we are puzzled by the character of any among the illustrious dead, and when other resources fail us, a saunter in the portrait gallery of the old house is often pregnant with suggestion. Of such a privilege it will be well to avail ourselves in the present instance. The time will be very well spent.

In the days when Mazarin was king, France had no more able or trusted servant than René de Voyer, Count d'Argenson. He was a nobleman

[1] 1.

o old Touraine—one of his ancestors had sailed with St. Louis [1]—and now in these latter days, he worthily fulfilled the promise of his name by a rich devotion to his country and her master. Mazarin knew his worth. He commends him to Cardinal Grimaldi as "*huomo versato e prudente*," [2] a phrase which is translated in an earlier letter to d'Argenson himself, where he compliments him on "*la prudence et l'adresse*" with which he had governed the Catalans.[3] His life was passed amid the stress and movement of affairs, the scene changing as circumstances of delicacy and danger called for the intervention of an accomplished hand. Only once, in 1640, is the sequence of activity broken, to reveal to us a sidelight of character which is brightly suggestive. Released for a time from the cares of administration—he had fallen into the hands of the Spaniards [4]—he employed the leisure so rudely thrust upon him in translating Thomas à Kempis, and in composing a treatise on "The Wisdom of a Christian." Years after, now grown old in the King's service, he laid aside the sword and robe, to don the cassock and die a servant of the Church.[5]

The portrait is broadly drawn, but already the features are clearly marked.

We pass on to his son, René II.[6] We are at once arrested. Were it not for the doublet and hose of the seventeenth century, we should mistake him for his own grandson. Young René de Voyer was destined, like his father, for the diplomatic

[1] 2. [2] 3. [3] 4. [4] 5. [5] 6. [6] 7.

service. His political pilgrimage had scarce begun when a cloud fell across his path. A rumour got abroad to the effect that the youthful diplomatist would be also a poet, and moreover, that he gave more time to religious exercises than was good for a young man who had the world before him. And so it was that when d'Argenson left for Venice with the King's commission, there was some misgiving in exalted circles; prayer and praise might be all very well, but they were not among the recognised resources of earthly diplomacy. Be that as it may, d'Argenson succeeded in commending himself to the citizens of the Republic.[1] At home he was not so fortunate. As his grandson observes, the embassy was a mistake.[2] In the first place, the thousand little complaisances, respectable and other, which were among the first conditions of comfort at court, were quite beyond him. Practically they filled him with despair, morally with disgust. Moreover he was cursed with that species of reserve which often comes of extreme humility, and is almost always attributed to extreme pride. When things went wrong at headquarters, he took to railing against the vices of the great; he fell out with Mazarin as he afterwards did with Colbert; and finally, after a few years of thankless labour, he was dismissed, and the door of advancement was closed against him. D'Argenson accepted his fate. He shut himself up on his country estates, consoling himself with the thought that he was an injured man.[3] But he was not of the men who

[1] 8. [2] 9. [3] 10.

can sit down and nurse their disappointments. Though cruelly broken, he set to work to repair his fortune and to repair his life. In the provinces of France, on the slopes of Touraine, there was plenty of work for a willing hand, as events too clearly proved. In that work d'Argenson found refuge from his manifold chagrins. The rest of his life—he was still but thirty-two [1]—was devoted to the development of his estates and to the welfare of his dependents. "Interested in the improvement of education and manners in the country, he gathered the peasantry together for lectures, instructing them himself, and exhorting them to the practice of their duties." [2] So he died, a failure, of a kind; one of those rich-souled men who are never successful until they fail. He bequeathed to posterity a number of devotional works, a "Paraphrase of the Prophet Jeremiah," an "Exposition of the Book of Job," and others of a like character. Yet, though entrenched behind numerous theological quartos, his orthodoxy was sadly open to attack. Having built a church, he dedicates it to the "Eternal Father," in scandalous disregard of the company of the saints.

Already it is apparent that we have to deal with men of singular force of character and fulness of soul. Evidently it was no mere freak of fortune which made the grandson of this luckless ambassador the greatest political moralist of his time.[3] Practical vigour, moral depth, they are in the blood of the d'Argensons. They look down upon

[1] 11. [2] 12. [3] 13.

us from the last canvas before which it is necessary to linger, the portrait of "Mon Père."

At the climax of the Grand Age, ere the slope of Avernus had yet begun, the King's justice was administered in the district of Angoulême by as strange a magistrate as ever shocked the susceptibilities of a court. He was in the prime of life, tall, dark, with striking features, and a glance that was charming and might be terrible. A strange figure did he make in that district court of Angoulême, as he sat dispensing justice quick and plentiful, patching up suits, cutting down fees, driving a vigorous pen through venerable formalities, and fondling the muzzle of his great hound, who sat blinking placidly upon the fuming functionaries, without the faintest sense of his unwarrantable intrusion.[1] So things went on until, in 1694, a special commission for the reform of abuses in the administration of justice appeared in Angoulême. My lords discovered, probably with equal surprise, the absence of abuses, and the presence of an extraordinary man. Of his capacity as a magistrate they had ample evidence before them; and the lighter experiences of a commission on circuit were sufficient to convince them that M. d'Argenson was excellent company, a man brimful of life and energy, whose wit sparkled with his wine.[2] To leave him to rust in a provincial court was of course out of the question. He was plied with hearty invitations to Paris and generous promises of service. "As a matter of fact, my

[1] 14. [2] 15.

father was not an ambitious man";[1] and it was only after much solicitation that he was decoyed to the capital, and introduced by M. de Caumartin, his friend of the commission, to the reigning Controller-General. Three years afterwards, at the age of thirty-nine, he was appointed chief of the Parisian police; and for twenty years and more, from the time of Ryswick to well on in the Regency, he became "the soul, always in action, scarcely ever in evidence,"[2] the soul of the great metropolis.

Henceforth his life was an eventful one. Criticism, caricature, opinion of all sorts, fastened upon it as a delectable morsel; its incidents were recorded, politely in the pages of contemporary memoirs, impolitely upon the walls of Paris. With the events themselves we are not concerned; we pursue them only for the character of the man. This is no place to relate how, when the woodyards of the Porte St. Bernard were on fire, he saved a quarter by the sacrifice of his clothes;[3] how in the year of Malplaquet, when bread was nine sous a pound and the Quartier du Temple took the pavement, he risked his life in confronting the mobs;[4] or to recall the memorable day when he presents a 'lettre de cachet' to the Abbess of Port Royal with a request for compliance within fifteen minutes;[5] or later, when, in the King's name, he was called upon to entertain one "François Marie Arouet, twenty-two, of no profession," in the Bastille,[6] and to be immortalised as a worthy successor of Cato in six tearfully cheerful verses.[7] He

[1] 16. [2] 17. [3] 18. [4] 19. [5] 20. [6] 21. [7] 22.

received the highest eulogy known to the classicism of the time. "He was made to be a Roman," writes Fontenelle,[1] his fingers trembling with unwonted enthusiasm, "and to pass from the Senate to the head of an army." And the daily routine was no less imposing. In toil unceasing, he forgets the distinction between night and day,[2] eats when he must, sleeps when he can. We see him dictating letters to four secretaries at a time,[3] dining in his carriage as it rattles over the stones,[4] vouchsafing an audience to a La Rochefoucauld at two in the morning.[5] His pleasures when he could snatch them were rich and strong. He had a lusty interest in life and living, and a hearty contempt for the Talon Rouge. D'Argenson's heels were of good cow-hide, and not wholly free from the mould of Touraine. His boon companions were not ministers and great lords, but "unknown men of the lower ranks," with whom, it is important to notice, "he was more at home than with people of more exalted station."[6] "In a gentlemanly way, he was fond of wine and women."[7] In the latter regard, his tastes were too catholic to be altogether creditable; but "he preferred nuns," as his son remarks, with a smile of remembrance at the old days. In fact, he had rigged up a lodging in the precincts of the Convent de la Madeleine de Traisnel; and all the magnificence of Versailles was less to him than an evening in the company of the Lady Superior.[8] But not even the charms of Madame du Veni could wean him from his

[1] 23. [2] 24. [3] 25. [4] 26. [5] 27. [6] 28. [7] 29. [8] 30.

devotion to duty. Paris never had such a chief of police.[1] Evil-doers trembled at the name of him; mobs, whether in the galleries of Versailles or in the faubourgs of Paris, quailed beneath his glance. They might well. When he liked, "he had a face that was frightful, and recalled those of the three judges of hell!"[2] But there is another side to all this. St. Simon, who liked him less than he admired him, says that "in the midst of his painful functions, he was always to be touched by the voice of humanity;"[3] and there is a little picture, from the hand of Fontenelle, which tells so much that it must be placed upon the line. It is the picture of an audience at the bureau of police. "Surrounded and deafened by a crowd of people of the lower orders, most of them hardly knowing what had brought them there, violently agitated about matters of the most trifling nature and often only half understood, accustomed not to rational speaking but to senseless noise, he had neither the carelessness nor the contempt which the applicants and their affairs might well have induced; he gave himself up whole-heartedly to the meanest details, ennobled in his eyes by their necessary relation to the public good; he suited himself to ways of thinking the lowest and the most gross; he talked to every one in his own tongue."[4] And so for the space of one-and-twenty years Marc René d'Argenson went his way, more loved and feared than any man in Paris. But that was not all.

[1] 31. [2] 32. [3] 33 [4] 34.

In September, 1715, the Grand Monarque died; and Liberalism gathered up the reins and went cantering gaily into a morass. After three years, d'Argenson was called upon to help it out. These were the days of the great "System," and of the encampment in the Rue Quincampoix. The Regent, abandoning his chemical researches, had been studying alchemy under John Law. For some time the great Experiment had been going well, altogether too well, it appeared, as difficulties gathered round it one by one. One obstacle had to be removed, cost what it might. On acceding to power, Orleans, in the innocence of his heart, had restored to the Parlement the right of remonstrance. Messieurs of the Long Robe had so far presumed upon his confidence as to attempt to use it. Strong measures became necessary, and a strong man. The old chancellor, d'Aguesseau, retired, and in January, 1718, d'Argenson received the seals.[1] On the 26th of August the crisis had come, and King and Parlement were face to face in the hall of audience at the Tuileries. "At last all was arranged and the assembly had resumed their seats. For a few moments"[2] there was a dead silence, while the gaze of many besides St. Simon was fixed upon a solitary seat below the King. "Motionless on his bench sat the Warden of the Seals, his look bent upon the ground, while the inward fire that played from his eyes seemed to penetrate every heart." He rose and delivered his memorable speech. The Parlement began their

[1] 35. [2] 36.

remonstrance, when suddenly the voice of d'Argenson rang clear and crushing: "What the King requires is obedience, and upon the spot!" [1] and the protest was silenced as by a "clap of thunder." It was a day of bitter humiliation for the Parlement and of triumph for their old enemy.

Other events of his ministry were less impressive, but not less important. As President of the Council of Finance (January, 1718), he succeeded during his first year in extinguishing arrears to the amount of sixteen million livres; [2] and he was the first to apply the system of direct collection (Régie) in regard to certain of the taxes.[3] As a financial minister he had only one failing. His homely prejudice in favour of honest dealing sometimes got him into trouble with the Regent; [4] but their occasional quarrels were only on the surface; and when d'Argenson was dismissed, as he was in June, 1720, for speeding the Bank upon its downward way,[5] he was allowed to keep his emoluments and his violet robe: [6] and a few years after he had quitted office, the Regent sent him a purse of gold, which was an annual perquisite of the Warden of the Seals.[7]

St. Simon shall finish the picture.[8]

"His retirement was of the strangest. He withdrew into a convent in the Faubourg St. Antoine, called La Madeleine de Tresnel. A long time before, he had fitted up an apartment in the convent buildings which he had furnished handsomely and well. It was as convenient as a house,

[1] 37. [2] 38. [3] 39. [4] 40. [5] 41. [6] 42. [7] 43. [8] 44.

and for many years he was in the habit of going there as often as he could. He had procured, even given, large sums to this convent for the sake of a Madame du Veni, who was the Superior—a relation, he said—and of whom he was very fond. She was a very charming person, extremely witty, and one of whom none have ever thought of speaking ill. All the Argensons paid court to her; but the strange thing about it was that when he was chief of police and fell ill, she left her convent to come to his house and to remain near him." [1] A strong man and a strange one, and withal, a lovable, as we learn from many besides Madame du Veni.

In June, 1720, his "brief and troublous ministry" [2] came to an end, and the Palais Royal knew him no longer. He had but a short time to enjoy the rest which had come to him as a happy release. On May 8, 1721, he died. Many was the shrewd encounter he had had with the rabble of the slums; and as the old chief was borne to his last home, he was pursued by the curses of the basket-women of Paris. And hearing of it, proud and beautiful old Mathieu Marais turned in disgust from "this mad populace, which, while he lived, dared never look him in the face;" and alone with his journal, with his mind upon the man who had passed away, he writes:—

"Who will have his soul, I know not. In the other world, as in this, there must be a fine debate over it." [3]

He left behind him one who was to uphold the

[1] 45. [2] 46. [3] 47.

honour of a worthy name, and to bequeath to criticism an exercise no less perplexing. Upon the features of his son, the Marquis d'Argenson of history, the family lineaments are clearly marked. The moral fibre, the exuberant vitality, the rough irreverence for the world and its ways, which distinguished the men whose portraits have been sketched, descended to the heir of their name. We have but to see how the given material was affected by the influence of an inauspicious training, to be in possession of the radical substance of d'Argenson's character. In default of such knowledge of the man and his mind, it is impossible to criticise his life with justice ; for without the secret of his singularities of temper, one is tempted to yield to that haste and impatience which they are too often apt to provoke. The secret once discovered, there is no longer any room for irritation ; but we are content to pity him for the weaknesses of his character, while we admire him for its real nobility.

II.

1694–1724.

Youth and early manhood—Intendant of Maubeuge.

"I RETURNED after supper at one o'clock. The man told me that his honour, the Chief of Police, desired to see me. It was to copy out fifteen circular letters to as many Intendants, and not to retire till it was done; my brother had already finished his task—an equal number—and my father had told him to go to bed. I took some coffee, and retired at four o'clock." [1]

He is a young man, very dark, with clear-cut features, his eye glancing with a rough vivacity as he plies his pen with nervous hand. There is a future before him; and, though he cannot be more than eighteen or nineteen,[2] he has already a past.

René Louis de Voyer d'Argenson was born at Paris in 1694, in the same year as two puissant men whose fortunes were to intersect his own, the Englishman, Henry St. John, and his friend and countryman Voltaire. Two years later he was

[1] 48. [2] 49.

joined by his brother, Marc Pierre, known to history as the astute and charming Count d'Argenson. His father, who had but lately come to Paris, was as yet known only as a rising Master of Requests; his mother was a sister of the distinguished de Caumartin, M. d'Argenson's patron and sponsor in the official world. Among his other natural endowments, the young René Louis possessed, and was possessed by, an expansive imagination; he early conceived and resolved upon a career. Before he was well in his teens, he was leading his brother along those devious courses by which a wholesome boy was to be turned into a fine gentleman and a man of the world.

"We were not born libertines, but are become so. I saw all the sights, I was at all the gatherings, I knew all the women. I thought to myself, what a fine figure I was making in the world."[1] The boys were not overburdened with parental solicitude. "My mother was good-natured and indulgent, and a clever woman; our escapades did not induce her to interfere with our habits."[2] The annoyance came from another quarter. The boys had a tutor, who is described with the true d'Argenson stroke as "fou, imbécile, ignorant, libertin, et hypocrite;"[3] one of those persons who, when you have executed some very bad drawings and love them very dearly, will vent his spleen by tearing them up.[4] It became too much for mortal endurance; and when one day the tutor "advanced upon his desk," the boy received him

[1] 50. [2] 51. [3] 52. [4] 53.

with doubled fists.[1] From that time forward d'Argenson went his way in peace; and the little rake's progress was proceeding apace, when it was overtaken by one of those strokes of destiny which it is equally impossible to foresee and to resist.[2]

He was sent to school.

In 1709, at the age of fifteen, he went with his brother to the Jesuit College of Louis-le-Grand, which had become, under the patronage of the Great King, the most fashionable of French public schools.[3] Thither, thirty years later, he was followed by another d'Argenson—one who, in the fulness of time and the sunshine of circumstance, was to leave a record, not of maimed and weary aspiration, but of rapid, resolute achievement—Anne Robert Jacques Turgot. But the lad was busied with other thoughts. From "a man of the world who could count his conquests,"[4] he had dwindled to the compass of a mere schoolboy; and his heart was heavy over his fallen state. Occasionally the boys acted tragedies at the College; and as d'Argenson sat in the amphitheatre, pilloried in his hateful gown, a glimpse of some fair spectator whom he had known in happier days would cover him with unutterable shame.[5] But he had the tenacity of purpose which distinguished his race; his time would come; and the modest treasure he was able to amass from the savings of his pocket-money, was dissipated upon those rare occasions when he could shake off the class-room

[1] 54. [2] 55. [3] 56. [4] 57. [5] 58.

dust from his feet, and plume himself in the great world again. "Why," he asks, with that strange recurrent smile of his, "why should one laugh at such an ambition? Surely it is upon the same canvas that that of conquerors is built (bâtie)!"[1] He possessed that keen, yet kindly humour of the man who knows himself, and can laugh at himself, without ceasing to be himself.

One incident in his school career he never forgot. It began with pea-shooters, and ended with a tragedy. One morning, as the venerable professor of rhetoric, Père Lejay,[2] entered the class-room, he was received with a raking fire of peas. The culprit platoon consisted of the Duc de Boufflers, Count d'Argenson, and his faithful apparitor, Marc Pierre. Boufflers received a flogging, and died from the effect of it. His father was only a duke. But when it came to the sons of M. d'Argenson, the retributive rod was stayed by the timely remembrance of that dark and dangerous person: Jesuitical discretion came into play,[3] and the youthful malefactors escaped. It is curious that the brothers should have lived, the one to be the powerful patron of the Jesuits, the other to attack them, for the eyes of posterity, with a weapon which carries further than a "Sarbacane."

But the young Count d'Argenson was not long to trouble the repose of his spiritual task-masters. He was to complete his education in another school, deemed no less necessary to the training

[1] 59. [2] 60. [3] 61.

of the whole and perfect man. From the sallow austerity of the reverend fathers, with their hard beds and their unspeakable soup, he passed to the gracious converse of ladies' society, where knowledge was savoured with a joyous sweetness, and where the rewards of success were great indeed. Dreaming long afterwards of the year 1712 and of the gallantries of that golden age, he sighs regretfully over the hearts that fell, and over those that might have fallen had the siege been pressed.

"What a fool I was not to have profited by them! I have repented at leisure." [1]

A votary of pleasure, he was never its slave; and an event was approaching which was soon to engage him in the more sober interests of life. On the morning of September 1st, 1715, the eyelids of the Grand Monarque closed upon a long and fateful chapter in French history; and the hearts of men beat high again with the generous hopes of a newer time. France, and the humblest of her children, d'Argenson, had reached the parting of the ways. The "epic of royalty" [2] was over; the epic of revolution was about to begin. In the development of the drama d'Argenson was to bear a modest, but no mean part. He was now twenty-one. The time for dreaming had passed away; the time for action was at hand. On the threshold of his career, we may pause to gather up those early half-conscious political impressions, which, in the case of quick-minded men, have a real, if only

[1] 62. [2] 63.

half-recognised, influence upon the direction of future thought.

He had been but a boy of eight when great events occurred.[1] We can well imagine with what childish pleasure he must have watched the stirring of the troops in Paris on the renewal of the great War; and the wide-eyed wonderment with which he may have heard how an army of France was cutting down French citizens for the pleasure of those great black men, whom every one laughed with and called abbé; and how everybody said that one Cavalier was as brave as he was beautiful, and that he and the like of him should have been at Blenheim! And then, as he grew in wit, the excitement of boyhood may have been clouded, if ever so little, by the growing desolation, as defeat followed upon disaster. He could remember how haggard men began to cry for bread; until at last, in 1709, the stones of Paris rose in mutiny, and his own father, the Chief of Police, went in fear of his life.[2] And through it all there was no comfort, but only men said that this Great King had been too great, that he had aroused the alarm of Europe, and that at last Europe had turned to bay. And then when the peace had come, and the people were beginning to breathe, Jesuit and Jansenist reopened their feud and reviled each other in the name of God; while d'Argenson suspected, what his friend Arouet and the wits who supped with the Grand Prior disdainfully averred,[3] that there was no truth to be found upon either side, but only

[1] 64. [2] 65. [3] 66.

arrogant unspirituality. And now the King, great though he had been, had gone the way of little men; and the hearts of his own people rejoiced, even as the nations whom he had humbled in the dust.

D'Argenson never forgot those fatal years. They haunted his memory and moulded his thought; and he could realise the gravity of the course before him, when, in 1716, he began his career as a councillor of the Parlement of Paris. Shortly afterwards, he received his first official appointment as Director of the Press.

As yet he had excited no great hopes. His father saw but little of him, and was inclined to regard him as rather a fool; the paternal hopes were centred upon his brother, the pleasing, popular and imposing Marc Pierre, then a young man of twenty. This unhappy partiality left a fatal mark upon the character of the elder son; and though d'Argenson never speaks of his father but with affection and respect,[1] he cannot disguise how deeply he felt it. And yet, it is curious to remember, he was before all things else his father's son. He inherited from him his passion for work;[2] to him he owed that instinctive regard for "le bien public,"[3] which afterwards ripened into absolute devotion; from him he drew that soundness of heart and incisiveness of mind which are d'Argenson's prime distinction as a thinker and a man. But there was another strand in the stout complexity of the father's nature, something which

[1] 67. [2] 68. [3] 69.

had led him, when he came to Paris, to shun the companionship of the great, and to seek his pleasure in a self-chosen society of the baser sort,[1] which had surrounded his life with the infernal obscurity of a magician's cell,[2] something of self-sufficience, of self-contentment, self-concentration. That too, for his own confusion, d'Argenson had inherited. It might have remained harmless; but nourished by his father's indifference and neglect, it grew with the rankness of a noxious weed. He came to find comfort in his own society. As his own company became dearer to him, so did the distance widen between himself and his fellows. Alone, he could be natural, forceful, even great at times; in society, he was pursued by a haunting self-distrust, which attracted disparagement and very often ridicule. As yet, it is true, beyond a touch of depreciation here and there,[3] we see very little of it; the energy of youth and his own strength of will enabled him to fight with his misfortune. But it had afflicted him with one disability which no effort, however determined, could overcome. It had rendered him for ever incapable of coping with the blatancy, the loud insistence, the insensate, trumpet-tongued vulgarity, with which every man of affairs is called upon to deal; and he relates an incident in his present experience as Director of the Press which shows that he was as helpless in the face of it now as he afterwards proved in the more august circle of the Council of State. He was arranging some matter with Machault,[4] who

[1] 70. [2] 71. [3] 72. [4] 73.

was then in charge of the police; his colleague was for carrying things off with a high hand; d'Argenson laid down his pen, looked at the man, rose, and retired from the business.[1] It was an act of weakness, but the weakness was invincible.

In spite of it, and of those defects of manner which led others to hold him in such scant esteem, there was one person who believed in d'Argenson, his aunt, Charlotte Emilie de Caumartin, Marquise de Balleroy. In one of the earlier letters of that famous correspondence[2] in which most of the materials for his life at this period are preserved, he tries to excuse his slackness in the friendly office of literary purveyor. "If I am not sending you any books," he writes (March 23, 1717), "it is not for want of will. I have brought misfortune on the Press. My censorial severity is silencing all our authors." There were more solid reasons for the unwonted lull in the activity of the Press Bureau.[3] There were no authors to silence. The literary efflorescence of the Grand Age was long since dead; while the new spirit, which was to be so fruitful in trouble to d'Argenson's successors, was only fermenting beneath the surface. It made its appearance with the "Lettres Persanes," which came—from Holland—in 1721. The Censor was not even made the tool of a political party. It is true that the battle of the "Constitution"[4] was raging as fiercely as ever; but Madame de Maintenon had disappeared, and it was no concern of Philippe d'Orléans. When the Government at last

[1] 74. [2] 75. [3] 76. [4] 77.

interfered (by declaration of October 7, 1717),[1] it was to proscribe the publications of both parties. It is very clear, and it is worth remarking, that d'Argenson was in entire accord with the policy of the Regent. His father, still in command of the police, was constantly behind the scenes, and was under no illusion as to the character of the actors.[2] He used to tell Marais that "if the Jansenists were rogues, the Jesuits were as bad, and that he held the proofs with regard to both of them."[3] The attitude of the son may readily be guessed. His one desire was for peace. In a letter to the Marquise (April 2, 1717) he describes a political brochure by one of her friends as "too bad to read, and not silly enough to laugh at. The Abbé de Guitaut had no reason to write that he detested the Constitution, and he had every reason to refrain from publishing his letter."[4] In short, he viewed the controversy with much concern, and the "Constitution" with none whatever.

Another question was coming to the front, which touched him more nearly as parliamentary councillor (Conseiller au Parlement). The Bank was flourishing, and in August, 1717, the Mississippi Company was successfully floated.[5] On the 2nd of September d'Argenson writes a letter :—

"Our Court of Parlement has received a scurvy compliment." It was a question of money, and they "desired explanations." The Regent replied "that it would be a strange thing if the factious

[1] 78. [2] 79. [3] 80. [4] 81. [5] 82.

opposition of the Parlement were to arrest the course of those advantageous measures which he wished to secure for the public; that we had no right to meddle with matters of finance; and that he would not suffer the royal authority to be made light of so long as it were entrusted to his care."[1]

He appears to be recording the first brush between the forces of the Parlement and of the Crown, and the opening of the hot battle which ended, exactly three years later (August 28, 1720), at Pontoise.[2] The young councillor was soon to be even more deeply interested in the progress of events. Five months afterwards (January 28, 1718) his father became Warden of the Seals, and President of the Council of Finance; and it was soon plain, from the threatening attitude of the Parlement, that their redoubtable enemy had not entered the ministry one moment too soon. For the present, indeed, the Government was content to hold its hand; for Dubois, the demon of the play, had not yet returned from London, where he was sedulously wooing the Hanoverian interest.[3] As for d'Argenson, his heart wavered 'twixt love for his father and loyalty to his brethren of the long robe. He had recourse to argument—for the Marquis was by this time impressed with his son's substantial worth.[4] "A tout ce que je lui exposai" the black-bearded minister had but one reply: "My good fellow! that Parlement of yours, has it any troops? For our part, we have 150,000 men!

[1] 83. [2] 84. [3] 85. [4] 86.

That's what it all comes to." "Et voilà parler en grand homme!" exclaims his son,[1] with an admiration which is the more natural for its inconsistency. But the "grand homme" was preparing to act. On August 16th Dubois arrived in Paris bearing a treaty of alliance with England; and the great *coup d'état* which crushed the pretensions of the Parlement and silenced the opposition to Law, followed upon the 26th.[2]

In December d'Argenson married,[3] and cast about for the means to feather his nest. Retiring discomfited from the Palais de Justice, he took refuge, like many an irate but thrifty parliamentarian, in the Rue Quincampoix. In November, 1719, when the tide of elation was in full flood and trembling on the ebb, we hear that d'Argenson "is in for (y est pour) 500,000 livres."[4] Three weeks afterwards, by decree of the 1st of December, the Bank and the Treasury refuse to receive cash. Before the end of the year the shares are falling.[5] On the 3rd of January M. d'Argenson withdraws from the control of the finances; on the 5th, Law takes the helm as Controller-General, and proceeds with the series of desperate decrees designed to save the credit of the Bank.[6] Upon one of the commissions which followed in quick succession d'Argenson was appointed[7] to serve as Master of Requests.[8] He could do so with a light heart. Warned in time, he had managed to extricate himself; and in a letter of the 22nd of February, 1720, we read: "Talking of shares, no one is coming off more

[1] 87. [2] 88. [3] 89. [4] 90. [5] 91. [6] 92. [7] 93. [8] 94.

prettily than M. d'Argenson *l'aîné*; he has just completed the purchase of an estate on the Réveillon road; it is his principal acquisition." [1]

Meanwhile he had obtained a provision of another kind. The Warden of the Seals, on withdrawing in January from the control of the finances, had managed, with his usual dexterity, to cover his retreat. Directly afterwards, to the no small scandal of St. Simon,[2] the young Chevalier was entrusted with the Lieutenancy of Police, while the elder brother, Count d'Argenson, received a seat at the Council of State, with an immediate promise of the Intendancy of Maubeuge. Thus it was that about the middle of March,[3] 1720, d'Argenson set out for his seat of government at Valenciennes, leaving Paris to face the appalling ruin created by the crash of the great "System." Though removed from the centre of the drama, a place was reserved for him in the final act. On the 21st of May appeared the suicidal decree which shattered what vestige of credit remained. It was inspired by d'Argenson's father,[4] and cost him the seals. He fell in the beginning of June. In July Law's carriage was wrecked under the very windows of the Regent in the court of the Palais Royal. In December the great adventurer took to flight; and Count d'Argenson had the supreme satisfaction of arresting him at Valenciennes, and, by an order from Paris, detaining his jewel case, the last resource of the broken man.[5] Personally the young Intendant has not much reason to complain. The

[1] 95. [2] 96. [3] 97. [4] 98. [5] 99.

"System" had left him with the valuable property of Réveillon; he was already a Councillor of State; and at the age of twenty-six he was comfortably established at Valenciennes as the chief magistrate of the important frontier province of Hainaut.

"I am sure I shall entreat you so much that you will come here; my house is not at all bad; it is scarcely in order, but you will find it even better than they usually are. An opera is coming to Valenciennes; we have very pretty lansquenet, ombre, picquet—you get plenty of that in the country[1]—quadrille and even brélan; a carriage; this summer your choice of drives, if you wish to see a country quite new to you, the towns in the environs. In a word, what shall I tell you? You will see people who love you very much, though I am speaking of one who does not know you yet, but for whom I bespeak your friendship." In this letter, a few weeks after his arrival, when the house-warming is complete, d'Argenson commends himself, his establishment and his young wife, to his trusted and right loyal friend, Madame de Balleroy. We may glance for an instant at this remarkable lady. At the age of nineteen, by a marriage with a country nobleman, she was widowed of the bright buoyancy of life at Paris; and amid the flat fields and uneventful hedgerows of Normandy,[2] her heart yearned for the patter of the distant pavement. Her forlorn beauty, her wasted wit, drew round her a little army of friends, held faithful by the affectionate discipline of pity;

[1] 100. [2] 101.

and in the goodly company of correspondents who reflect for her the gaieties of the Regency,[1] not the least honourable place is held by her nephew d'Argenson.

Certain features which his letters disclose must be brought for a moment into relief. In the first place, he shows himself a devoted friend and a dutiful correspondent; in the latter regard he is a shining example to his brilliant young brother.[2]

Moreover, we occasionally come across a story, which, if we forget the manners of the time, it seems as strange that a gentleman should have been able to write as that a lady should been willing to read. Yet it is comforting to find, in reading such passages, that if there is an utter absence of delicacy or reserve, there is an equal freedom from mere smirking prurience; the man's breath is tainted by the fashion of the time, but at least his heart is whole.

Sometimes again d'Argenson's feeling for the ideal, which explains so many of amiable vagaries, is seen taking wing and soaring away to the sound of his own laughter. "I mean my bust (February 18, 1718[3]) to be in the library of Balleroy, with that of Pico de la Mirandola, and some great personage or other who, after all, could do no more than read. The proposal, perhaps, is not very reasonable as yet;[4] of the two, I am more like the latter."

In one letter we get a glimpse of d'Argenson's

[1] 102. [2] 103. [3] 104. [4] 105.

most cherished interior, and so of the man who loved it.

"I assure you, Rouillon (Réveillon) is becoming a fine house. In a gallery on the wing will be my library, with a little reading-room at one end, plenty of desks, sofas, cushions, upholstery in morocco—all the novelties of Holland; and from the windows a vista of avenues, kitchen gardens, woods, meadows, sheep. Won't you be charmed with it when you are at Paris this summer?" (August 8, 1722).[1]

His occasional reference to "le cadet" is interesting, in the light of their subsequent relations. With a touch of good-natured envy he remarks, "My brother is surpassing himself as Chief of Police. He is a perfect courtier; in that regard he has nothing to learn" (August 8, 1722).[2] Perhaps indeed the most precious thing about these letters is the light they throw upon the real character of the younger brother, and on d'Argenson's subsequent portrait of him. A comparison of the young "Chevalier" who writes over his own signature, with the eternal "Mon Frère" of d'Argenson's Journal, enables us to estimate the personal equation in d'Argenson's political criticism. It tends to suggest that the impression of high colouring, exaggeration, unfairness, which is left by the perusal of many of his more trenchant pages, is due, not to the intrinsic falsity of his judgments, but to the violence and heat with which they are pronounced. We see that to many of his

[1] 106. [2] 107.

indictments the question, "Well! what of it? how could he help it?" would have been at least a valid reply; and we suspect that had d'Argenson judged his own contemporaries with that same deep-sounding charity which, after a century and a half, one can claim no credit for applying to himself, we should have been spared much of that bitterness which he expends so lavishly upon the men of his time, and above all upon his brother, Count d'Argenson. So far as one can see, the truth was this. Marc Pierre was his mother's son, the blood of the Caumartins in every vein.[1] In him the rough-hewn strength of the d'Argenson character was fashioned to a form of lightness and grace; and losing in massiveness, it gained in charm. He had his father's strength without his seriousness; his power of work without his love of it. He impressed his contemporaries[2] by his singular union of facile effectiveness with absolute unconcern. Such a passage as this, which appears in a letter of 1715,[3] needed no signature for identification.

"At last, my dear aunt, the taxes are achieving what all the preachers in the world have never dared to undertake. Luxury is no more. The balls of the Opera and Comedy are as deserted as the ante-chamber of M. Desmarets or M. de Pontchartrain.[4] The churches are rather more patronised than they were; there, for example, you see men of business who have not yet been taxed, praying, at the foot of the altar, for a lot more pleasant than has fallen to their companions; you

[1] 108. [2] 109. [3] 110. [4] 111.

see poor Molinists beside themselves at the triumph of their adversaries, and sighing for the re-establishment of Jesuit influence. There you see many a young girl in tears, sorrowing for the purse of the financier who used to keep her in such gay profusion, and crying out upon the harshness of the powers that be at present, who work to construct their own fortunes before taking thought for that of their mistresses. Even me you see there now and again, vastly puzzled as to where I shall dine or sup, and turned pious for want of something better to do."

After reading such a passage as this, a new light breaks upon one of the first notices of Count d'Argenson that appear in the Journal, and upon a thousand more that follow at intervals for nearly thirty years.

"It is certainly true that my brother has not the secret of attaching to himself the men whom he serves. His lack of interest is the principal cause; it lays him open to the charge of insincerity in friendship." [1] It is here, in this "distraction," implicit in every line of that youthful letter, that we touch the real foundation for those continual charges of cold cleverness, absence of principle, paltriness of aim, pettiness of means, with which Count d'Argenson is pursued. It was this that divided the brothers with a severance of interest that nothing could bridge. At the outset of life their roads diverged. The one led to greatness through labyrinths of littleness; the other was the

[1] 112.

way of honest, impotent, disdainful obscurity. The simple truth was that the younger brother, keen, accomplished, utterly careless, was free to choose the pleasanter of the two; for the elder, it was barred from the beginning. His estrangement from the world had wholly unfitted him for the arts of complaisance and intrigue; and there was something within him which protested that they were as far beneath him as they were beyond his reach. D'Argenson went his own way; he found that it led nowhither. He was to learn that without those arts which he coveted and despised, devotion, disinterestedness, were no passport to power; yet, it is good to reflect, he would never consent to lose his devotion in the ignobler interests of a private life. When the last word is said, it may be found that of the two brothers it was he who had chosen the better part; and that if, in spite of him, knowledge and justice require us to count small blame to the one, we may ascribe with equal heartiness all honour to the other.

This in anticipation; for d'Argenson is still at Valenciennes, without a thought that the unlikeness of character revealed in these letters to Madame de Balleroy will ever lead to open estrangement.

It was about the middle of March, 1720, that d'Argenson took over his province. He left behind him at Paris at least one person who would watch his career with lively interest. In 1718, in the salon of Madame de Lambert, he had been introduced to a man, whose recent expulsion from the

French Academy for some shrewd criticisms of the late reign had given him credit among the younger spirits—the Abbé de St. Pierre.[1] We can easily imagine how d'Argenson must have been attracted to a man, who had his own breadth and generosity of mind, and who was crippled like himself by the lack of those social arts which would have secured for his opinions a perilous respect. The regard appears to have been mutual; and when d'Argenson made his first venture in public life, it was under the auspices of the utopian abbé. A letter which survives, addressed by him to the Intendant of Valenciennes,[2] is alone sufficient to suggest the influence which inspired d'Argenson with his political philosophy.

St. Pierre encourages him to attempt a reform in the distribution of the taille; and incidentally he remarks:

"Those states are the best governed where justice between individuals is most exactly observed; there the people are more prosperous than elsewhere. It were to be desired that there were never favours to hope for from a minister, but only justice for which to apply to him; for it is seldom that favour to one is not injustice to another." He concludes his letter with the words:

"I have a great desire to be able to watch your new government, and I expect your success will soon persuade plenty of people besides myself that you are worthy of high office."

That d'Argenson, from the point of view of the

[1] 113. [2] 114.

Government at least, was successful, there is little reason to doubt. The chief features of his administration may be lightly reviewed. In addition to his work of routine as superintendent "de justice, police, et finance," he kept an intelligent watch for the appearance of abuses, and also for possibilities of reform. His province, on the frontier of Flanders, involved him in duties of a "military even more than of a judicial or financial character."[1] The condition of the troops engaged his attention; he early discovered that "the army contractors are great rascals," and that the men were being defrauded of a part of their rations; he introduced a reform which was afterwards adopted throughout the French army, and for which he is careful to claim the credit.[2] In another direction he showed the liberal tendencies which afterwards distinguished him. In time of abundance, he permitted the exportation of corn, and derived a useful revenue from the sale of the license.[3] In the same connection too, he succeeded with much address in averting one of the periodical bread panics which were caused by the restrictions on the interchange of corn.[4] With a pitiful regard for the soldiers and the common people, he had a formidable hatred of knaves in authority. Having disposed of the "fraudulent contractors," he turned his attention to "quelques coquins de bourgeois," who availed themselves of the custom of extending the term of municipal tenure upon great occasions, to enjoy their offices at the expense of their fellow citizens. He took

[1] 115. [2] 116. [3] 117. [4] 118.

the opportunity of the consecration of Louis XV. at Rheims—at which, by the way, d'Argenson himself was present [1]—to post a proclamation "at all the cross-roads of my towns," requiring the elections to proceed as usual.[2] In short, he went to work in such a way as to open the eyes of his oldest friends to the real ability concealed behind his unpromising exterior.[3] But with all his success, he had good reason to be dissatisfied with his position. He had escaped with great luck at the beginning of the Mississippi crash,[4] but before it was over he was badly hit. His father-in-law, M. Méliand, Intendant of Lille, "had been kind enough" to remit his wife's dowry in Bank notes at a time when the notes were only useful as waste paper.[5] There were other disappointments in store for him. In May, 1721, his father died. The old man, regarding the Chevalier, now to be the Count, as the real hope of his family, had bequeathed to him the whole of his personal property, leaving the Marquis d'Argenson burdened with the family estates.[6] Moreover, M. Méliand showed no disposition to retire in his favour from the rich Intendancy at Lille, for which d'Argenson had naturally hoped;[7] and meanwhile, his own establishment at Valenciennes was involving him in expenses which he was ill prepared to meet. In the midst of these embarrassments an event occurred which seemed to open a prospect of escape. To explain it, a slight retrospect will be necessary.

[1] 119. [2] 120. [3] 121. [4] 122. [5] 123. [6] 124. [7] 125.

Shortly after his marriage, and about a year before leaving Paris, he had formed an intimacy with a Madame de G——,[1] whom we recognise from his description of her as "sincere, affectionate, faithful, reasonable, and generous," as a type of those virtues which d'Argenson especially loved, and of which he was inclined to suspect the absence in women generally, and in his own wife in particular. Madame de G—— had a cousin, the wife of the Ambassador to Sardinia. In the winter of 1719, this lady returned from Turin, without visible means of subsistence. But there was always a royal road to affluence open to bankrupt ladies-of-fortune, and with no unnecessary delay Madame de Prie was "administered"[2] to that libidinous dyspeptic, the Duc de Bourbon. Shortly afterwards, "we"—that is, M. le Duc, Mesdames de Prie et de G——, and young d'Argenson were "en partie carrée"; at last the dream of his youthful years was realised, and d'Argenson was able to make a fine figure as an intimate of "the first prince of the blood."[3] The "Partie" was broken up by d'Argenson's departure for Valenciennes, and it lingered in his mind merely as a pleasant memory. He was soon to recall it with more lively concern. At the end of November, 1723, business called him to Paris. On the day of his return, he had an interview with the Regent, and remarked how ill he looked.[4] On the following evening, at Valenciennes, he was standing by the chimney corner talking to a friend when a courier was

[1] 126. [2] 127. [3] 128. [4] 129.

announced. It was the 3rd of December: d'Orléans was dead. We can well imagine with what feelings d'Argenson must have heard that his illustrious patron of the "Partie carrée" had become the ruler of France, and that a lady who had already offered him "les dernières faveurs,"[1] had succeeded to the footstool of Madame de Parabère. Evidently it was not at Valenciennes that the golden eggs were going to be laid. Moreover, his brother was for the second time chief of the Parisian police;[2] he had lately been appointed Chancellor of the Orléans household; in a word, he could be of infinite service. If any doubts remained as to the wisdom of his course, they were dispelled by a letter[3] from his uncle, the Marquis de Balleroy, advising him to use no delay in taking his place at the Council of State. His mind was made up; and on the 28th of December, 1723, he wrote to M. le Duc, resigning the Intendancy of Hainaut.

Eight days afterwards (January 4, 1724), he writes to Madame de Balleroy: "I have said good-bye to the provincial dignity. Thank heaven! Thank heaven!" But d'Argenson had not more reason to thank heaven than usual. He soon discovered that, with all his masterly calculation, it was the worst thing he could have done. His brother had not found favour in the eyes of Madame de Prie;[4] and as chancellor of the House of Orléans, he was not acceptable to M. le Duc.[5] The latter, so far from welcoming d'Argenson to the

[1] 130. [2] 131. [3] 132. [4] 133. [5] 134.

Council of State, was simply incensed at his untimely resignation;[1] it may even have been this that decided him to dismiss Count d'Argenson from the Lieutenancy of Police immediately afterwards. In fact, we have here a first glimpse of one side of d'Argenson's nature, which we shall meet continually in more august, if not to him more important, affairs. He was endowed with a conceptive faculty of the first order; it is the breadth, the intimate grasp of his conceptions, with the complex character behind them, that constitute his enduring claim to remembrance. But he had the attendant weakness of the man of many devices, an eager, unquestioning faith in the efficacy of his own plans; and upon that rock his fortunes were continually splitting. His power of combination and his belief in his own strategy were constantly leading him into precipitate action, and involving him in difficulties against which a man of more sluggish imagination and narrower mind would never have had even to guard. It was not that his strategy was weak; it was generally powerful, and often profound; but the moment it left his study, it became stiff, useless, and often ridiculous, for want of those small political and social arts which his brother possessed to perfection. We can easily imagine the course which that brother would have taken had he been in d'Argenson's place. He would have addressed to M. le Duc a delightful letter of congratulation, reminding him playfully of the old days of the "Part Carrée," and closing with protestations of

[1] 135.

renewed zeal for his service. He would then have spent the next six months in finding or contriving, honestly or otherwise, a pretext for at once returning to Paris and gratifying his powerful patron. Unhappily such a course was too slow and small and politic for d'Argenson's temperament; his resignation was disastrous; and as chance would have it, it was nearly twenty years before the brothers recovered the ground they now lost. Certainly, in d'Argenson's case at least, it was not for want of effort. After a few months at the Council, he discovered that there were "too few opportunities of serving the public in this business of judge, where one has scarcely a vote for the thirtieth part of a decree."[1] The Intendancy of Paris became vacant; he tried to obtain it; but Madame de Prie was inexorable, and the appointment was refused.

"As for me, I was good for nothing. I was merely an old friend, who had been good enough to be unwilling to take advantage of her kindness."[2] We shall meet again with this amiable weakness for explaining his failures by reasons which are less correct than they are complimentary to himself. Even yet he did not give up hope. His marriage with Mademoiselle Méliand had given him a right to expect the reversion of the Intendancy of Lille.[3] He now tried to arrange for its transference to him; but M. Méliand drove a hard bargain and the negotiation fell through.

We now reach one of the turning-points in

[1] 136. [2] 137. [3] 138.

d'Argenson's life. Never was a man more commendably eager to distinguish himself, to play his part in the world, and to preserve an honourable name in honour by contributing his share towards the "Bien Public." He now saw himself, chiefly through his own lack of patient adroitness, banished to the obscurity of private life. He found misfortune a stern mistress, but her lessons were as worth learning as they were hard to learn. It was indeed at this time of disappointment that his mind became imbued with what is rarest and greatest in his political thought. While his brother, in the Orléans household, strove, by all the arts of which he was a master, to win his way back to power, d'Argenson withdrew entirely from the scene. He called to mind the words of his father, that "a lofty and ambitious man will have all or nothing;" and, in M. Aubertin's phrase, he became content with nothing that he might have all. For some years we hear nothing of him; it is only in 1731 that he again appears upon the scene under the protection of the minister Chauvelin.

His life in the interval must be reserved for another chapter. In the present, but one word remains to be said; it is perhaps the most important of all.

We are already in a position to appreciate d'Argenson as of a peculiarly complex nature; and its complexity is the more puzzling from the fact that the sterling ore of character is combined with traits, not of wickedness, but of weakness. He possesses in abundance those qualities which men

love and admire; and yet we scarcely become intimately acquainted with him upon any single occasion without being tempted to laughter. The reason is only too clear. His real loftiness of spirit is yoked with a kind of halting timidity, with which the unhappy experience of his earlier years had afflicted him; and for such a man, to be sublime was too often to appear ridiculous. Occasionally amusement deepens to an even less pleasant feeling; for he held, and he had a right to hold, strong opinions upon men and things; and he sometimes records them in terms so unmeasured as to awaken sympathy with his unheard opponents and to arouse suspicion as regards himself. Moreover, he is himself so simply ingenuous as not to understand the necessity of discreet suppression; and he pursues, with painful circumstance, those moods of irritation, disappointment, disillusion, those momentary vices of temper, which all men perhaps are small enough to feel, but few are great enough to be able to record. Such failings might be taken for what they are worth—which is very little—were it not that, magnified out of all proportion by some of d'Argenson's most influential critics, they have been made the basis for conceptions of his character which are too ungenerous to be critically just. Faults they are, undoubtedly; but in reading, day after day, the revelations of his Journal, one feels that in this man, with all his failings, there is something verily great; and that morally, he towers above the ready coxcombs who laughed at him while he lived, or

who have sneered at his memory when it alone remained.

It is, then, with keen curiosity that one seeks for something which will explain this persistent faith in d'Argenson, nor is the quest in vain. Here and there among the pages of his Journal, buried amid much that is ephemeral and often worthless, one comes across passages which are perfect gems of feeling and expression. They show us d'Argenson at his best, and enable us to divine what is best in him. Among the first hundred pages there are at least three such episodes standing out in fine relief. One is the tale of the parrot that troubled the repose of the Intendant of Hainaut.[1] Another, even more charming and suggestive, is the story of Kakouin, the pet boar which was given him by St. Contest, his friend of the Entresol, and which came to such an untimely end.[2] Read in the light of many that follow, these pages reveal such a perfect beauty of heart, such a faultlessness of emotional touch, as is as rare as it is lovely; they spring, pure and clear, from the depths of the man's soul, wholly undarkened by that turgidity of feeling to which the enthusiasm of humanity afterwards gave birth.

It was not alone to the pets of his own household that d'Argenson's heart was given. There was room in it left for the "brutes" of La Bruyère, "whose faces, when they rose upon their feet, were as the faces of men." One day, in the year 1725, he travelled four leagues to the village of Sezanne,

[1] 139. [2] 140.

through which the young Queen, Maria Leczinska, was to pass on her entry into France. His account of what he saw there forms the third of those pictures of this date which enable us to penetrate to the heart of the man, and to follow him afterwards with an unfailing respect. In the course of the narrative he says:

"The harvest and the crops of all sorts were in danger of perishing; they could not be gathered for the continual rains; the poor labourer was looking out for a moment of dry weather in order to get them in. Yet for all that this whole district was beaten with several scourges. The peasants had been carried off to put the roads by which the Queen was to pass into fit condition; and they were only the worse, so much so that Her Majesty often thought she would drown; they had to drag her from her carriage by main force as they could. In several places she and her suite were swimming in the water, which lay over the whole country, and that in spite of the infinite pains expended by a tyrannical ministry."[1]

And further on he says:

"In the evening, after supper, I went for a stroll round the market-place of Sezanne. For a moment the rain had ceased. I spoke to some poor peasants, who had their horses with them, attached to the tail of a cart, and standing in the night without provender. Some of them told me that their horses had had nothing to eat for three days.

[1] 141.

They were harnessing ten in the place of four; judge how much of them remained!" [1]

One can scarcely pretend, by fragments of translation, to convey even a shade of the impression produced by these whole passages, and by many that deserve to stand beside them. After reading them, and allowing them to leaven and lighten one's whole conception of d'Argenson's character, it is with keen pleasure we meet with a luminous remark in the pages of one of his most accomplished critics:

"C'est par le cœur, en effet, que son esprit est grand," says M. Aubertin; [2] and it is the happiest word that has been devoted to d'Argenson.

We have but to accept it, and we are enabled to remit to their due place those small distempers, those accidents of the inauspicious moment, which have often hardened the regard of criticism; we see how very little they appear by the side of what was greatest and best in d'Argenson. Qualities are virtuous in proportion as they are necessary; and events have thrown a suggestive light upon the relative value of the various virtues in the France of the Eighteenth Century. We see that there was something more real and rare than those elegant adornments, those small dexterities, which were then so dearly prized: that they afford but thin subsistence for a society bereft of honesty, devotion, depth of vision, and soundness of heart. Those qualities d'Argenson possessed, and the children of this world laughed at him. Their

[1] 142. [2] 143.

generation does not last for ever; and we, who are on the hither side of 1793, may be excused for thinking that, with all the failings that whetted their wit, there were very few among them who could be mentioned in a breath with the man they honoured by their laughter.

D'Argenson could feel, but he was no sentimentalist. The years which he now passed in obscurity were among the happiest and most fruitful of his life.

III.

1724–1744.

The Entresol—Political struggles—Relations with Cardinal Fleury—D'Argenson and Voltaire.

Among the influences which connected d'Argenson with the tradition of the late reign were his relations with that curious and not very admirable person,[1] the Abbé de Choisy. It would appear that during the closing years of his life the harlequin abbé was on terms of some intimacy with his young relative;[2] and shortly before his death in 1724, he placed in d'Argenson's hands a collection of manuscripts,[3] from which the published remains of de Choisy are principally derived.[4] Among them was a record which d'Argenson might recall with a certain melancholy interest.[5] It seems that in 1692, de Choisy's rooms at the Luxembourg became the head-quarters of a little company of thirteen men, among whom were Fontenelle and Perrault, and others distinguished in literature and society.[6] They met for discussions upon

[1] 144. [2] 145. [3] 146. [4] 147. [5] 148. [6] 149.

politics, theology, and moral science, and in fact all those questions of more pressing and immediate concern which the constitution of the three existing Academies ignored. It may well be imagined that such an organisation could scarcely commend itself to the favour of the Monarch who, a few years afterwards, was to break the heart of Vauban ; and before a year had passed, the Academy of the Luxembourg came to an untimely end. The collapse was natural enough, for these were the palmy days of the older *régime ;* its vices were still to be revealed, and as yet the discussion of political subjects by unauthorised persons might well have seemed an impertinence. Thirty years after, the matter had assumed a different aspect. Disasters abroad and miseries at home, which had stirred the patriotism of Vauban, the ferment created by the advent of the Regency, the widespread concern for questions of administration aroused by the rise and fall of the great "System," and, lastly, the object lesson in political fatuity afforded by the ministry of the Duc de Bourbon, all contributed to raise matters of government to a place of primary interest ; and it is not surprising that about a year after the publication of the "Lettres Persanes," a serious and successful attempt should have been made to organise and define political thought. In 1722 the Abbé Alary invited a number of gentlemen connected with the administrative and diplomatic services to meet in his rooms in an entresol in the Place Vendôme, which became for about eight years the home of the memorable

"Club de l'Entresol." The idea of this, the first of French political societies, was probably suggested by Bolingbroke, an intimate friend of Alary, who may have hoped to find, in a little cabinet of embryo statesmen, some mild consolation for his banishment from Whitehall. Certain it is that the English politician did much to give it a successful start; and a year afterwards (July, 1723) we find him writing to the perpetual president, Alary:[1]

"You will give my kind regards to our little Academy. If I were not sure of seeing them again next month, I should be quite miserable. They have confirmed my taste for philosophy; they have revived my old love for literature; how grateful I am to them!"

In 1725, upwards of a year after his return from Valenciennes, d'Argenson became a member of the Entresol;[2] and some time afterwards he had the honour of introducing a man whose whole life was devoted to insisting upon the paramount importance of political concerns—his friend and master, the Abbé de St. Pierre.[3]

It is a curious fact that the man who received the record of the ill-starred society of the Luxembourg should have become the historian of its successor; for it is from d'Argenson that our knowledge of the Entresol is mainly derived. Several years after its suppression, he sat down to record his reminiscences of "a little organisation, whose history, at present unknown to many

[1] 150. [2] 151. [3] 152.

people, will soon be forgotten by all the world."[1] Events are grouped very differently by the redressing hand of time, and, apart from the interest attaching to it in connection with the life of d'Argenson, the Entresol is in no danger of being forgotten.

Its meetings[2] were held on Saturday evenings, and lasted from five o'clock till eight. The time was spent in the recital of political news, conversation on passing events, the reading of papers, and open discussion. The procedure, though carefully ordered, was sufficiently elastic, and on extraordinary occasions—as when His Excellency Horace Walpole appeared to advocate the maintenance of the understanding with England[3]—might be entirely suspended. Not the least useful member of the Entresol was d'Argenson himself; he joined in its labours with his usual industry and zeal. He made it his business to extract the political intelligence from the leading newspapers—those of Holland[4]—at the same time maintaining a correspondence with Florence[5] and Brussels. In addition to this, he undertook the department of canon law, with which his position on the ecclesiastical committee of the Council of State peculiarly fitted him to deal.[6] In connection with this subject, he read to the society a series of papers in which he argued strongly for the independence and the pre-eminence of the civil power. His conclusions might have been less absolute had he known that they were one day to rise up in judgment against him in the

[1] 153. [2] 154. [3] 155. [4] 156. [5] 157. [6] 158.

shape of two formidable quarto volumes.[1] In the general debates he took an active part, and his discussions with St. Pierre upon the innumerable projects which the latter presented to the society were recalled by him with lively pleasure.

Though devoted to political research, "the good Entresolists" were careful to exclude even the suggestion of pedantry. They formed a sort of "club" on the English model. "We had all sorts of pleasant things, comfortable seats, a good fire in winter, and in summer windows opened upon a pretty garden. There was no dinner or supper, but tea was to be had in winter, and in summer lemonade and cooling drinks. The gazettes of France, Holland, and even the English papers, were always to be found there." In a word, it was "un café d'honnêtes gens."[2] On the summer evenings, when the meeting was over, they used to go for a stroll round the terrace of the Tuileries, discussing the questions that had arisen in the debate. In the winter they "went straight home, and always with a fresh regard for the Entresol."[3]

It may well be imagined that a society of this kind must have inspired a very warm feeling among those who were privileged to take part in it; and d'Argenson is affectionately anxious to make it clear that its ultimate dissolution was in no way due to failure of interest. We might well believe it from the letters of one of its most distinguished members, the hero of Dantzig, Count de Plélo, whose appointment to Copenhagen in 1728 was

[1] 159. [2] 160. [3] 161.

largely due to the prestige he acquired as a member of the Entresol.[1] From the cold solitudes of the Baltic he writes to the President: "O! this accursed climate! Am I never again to breathe the air of the Entresol?"[2] and again, "A person accustomed to read the Gazette at the Entresol finds it very dry reading all alone at Copenhagen."[3] And then, when the crisis came and the society was no more, he writes:

"I can imagine how keenly you feel the unhappy fate which has befallen the Entresol. Would you ever have believed that anything so innocent could fall under suspicion? Surely something out of the common must have happened since my departure, or else the great ones of the earth have very little to do."[4]

The attitude of the "great ones" is not without interest. Even Cardinal Fleury had been compelled to breathe the air of the Regency; and upon succeeding to the authority of the Duc de Bourbon, he was inclined to look graciously upon the nascent society.[5] Nor was his protection hastily withdrawn, for in the winter of 1730 he appointed its president Curator of the King's Library, and thither the meetings of the Entresol were transferred.[6] In the following summer it received a further earnest of ministerial approval in the preferment of Alary to the tutorship of the Children of France.[7] In the elation produced by these marks of favour the members threw off their accustomed reserve, and the proceedings of the Entresol acquired a notoriety

[1] 162. [2] 163. [3] 164. [4] 165. [5] 166. [6] 167. [7] 168.

which was little to the mind of its more cautious spirits.

"I tired myself to death in recommending moderation and discretion, even in regard to the name of the Entresol; for I kept saying to them: 'You will see that one fine morning the Government will ask us what we are about.'"[1]

But d'Argenson's efforts were powerless to withstand the vain temerity of some of the members; the fatal day arrived at last; and at one of the meetings in the autumn of 1731, Alary appeared with the announcement that he had a poniard in his heart, and that the days of the Entresol were numbered.[2] There was no gainsaying the will of the Cardinal, and the dissolution was effected in decent silence. But it was not accepted without an effort. A little conspiracy was formed among the more earnest members, with d'Argenson for one of the ringleaders; the day of meeting was changed to Wednesday; the black sheep were excluded; and it was hoped that by absolute silence and a careful avoidance of ministers, they would be able to hold on until the storm had blown over. Yet scarcely three meetings had been held when d'Argenson fell into the hands of Chauvelin, who extracted from him a promise that no further effort would be made to revive the beloved society.[3] There was no more to be said.

D'Argenson's personal disappointment was keen enough, nor was he slow to appreciate the public loss. He writes reproachfully: "It is surprising

[1] 169. [2] 170. [3] 171.

that so many sciences are cultivated in Europe, whilst there is not a single school of public law. Why should not theoretic knowledge be as useful to society in general as to societies in particular? You aspire to employment in the public service, and you cannot qualify yourself by preliminary practice; for this is the fashion which has been introduced into France in our day: people say, 'When I am appointed ambassador, when I am raised to the Ministry, I will learn the duties of my post.'"[1]

It was not upon d'Argenson that the loss fell; his political apprenticeship was already complete. On those Saturday evenings in the Place Vendôme, he had learnt to think clearly and boldly upon public questions; and the doors of the Entresol were scarcely closed when he resolved to turn his acquirements to account.

He was now in his thirty-seventh year. His affairs, which had often given rise to embarrassment, had been arranged by the recent sale of Révcillon (December, 1730);[2] there appeared to be no further obstacle in the way of a successful career. He was not slow in adopting the only means by which a political aspirant could bring himself under the notice of the governing powers—the presentation of gratuitous advice; and it was at this time that he began that series of memoirs which was continued until after his accession to the ministry, and which would have been such an invaluable treasury of contemporary history and

[1] 172. [2] 173.

thought.[1] Unhappily they all perished in the burning of the library of the Louvre in 1871,[2] and our only knowledge of them is derived from fragmentary notices published before that date. The series appears to have begun in December, 1731; and it is pleasant to find that here again that amiable influence which had appeared so early in d'Argenson's career was present to lend him a guiding hand. A memoir which d'Argenson proposed to present against the arbitrary distribution of the taille (December, 1731), was scored with annotations by St. Pierre, who advised that it should be cut down, that certain vague views about things in general should be excised, and that the author should confine himself to a single point. "He must not give occasion to say, 'He is a fine talker, he is an eloquent speaker, *qui bat la campagne*.'"[3] St. Pierre was himself too melancholy a proof of the wisdom of his own advice for d'Argenson to reject it lightly; and in May, 1732, we find him writing:

"I was several months without meddling with affairs of state; I did not wish to give myself out for a maker of memoirs."[4]

This wholesome caution was not long sustained, nor indeed was it really necessary. The time was one of keen political excitement. It was in this very summer of 1732 that the great conflict of old French privilege and tradition against the arrogant zeal of the Ultramontane party reached its acutest stage; and it happened that that was the question

[1] 174. [2] 175. [3] 176. [4] 177.

of all others with which d'Argenson was competent to deal. He had been for some years a member of the ecclesiastical committee of the Council, and at the Entresol, as we have seen, he had been charged with the department of canon law.[1] Upon the questions at issue he entertained ideas at once liberal and politic. He admitted in principle the plea of ecclesiastical authority; but as a politician he deprecated any encouragement of its supporters in their factious proceedings against the Jansenists; the attitude of the Government in regard to heterodoxy should be simply one of passive disapproval. But it was no longer time to think of principles and policies; the matter had now resolved itself into a fierce conflict of privilege between the Crown and the Parlement of Paris. On the 13th of June the Parlement accepted an appeal in the teeth of direct orders from the King. The reception was quashed by a decree of Council, and four magistrates were sent to join Pucelle in exile. The Chambers of Inquests and Requests immediately resigned.[2] D'Argenson's views upon the crisis were strong and clear. They were laid before the Ministry; and the author received a letter from Chauvelin, the Warden of the Seals, to the effect that two hours' conversation with him would be of material service to the Government. He set out at once for Compiègne, halted a moment for breath, scribbled out a "policy complete," and presented it to Chauvelin in a secret interview which lasted from five o'clock in the morning until nine.[3] In

[1] 178. [2] 179. [3] 180.

the whole of the discussions he appears to have taken a prominent part; he was kept informed, by secret channels, of the deliberations of the Cabinet;[1] and he seems to have been treated throughout as an active and esteemed adviser.

The nature of his advice we are at no loss to determine. Among the documents destroyed at the Louvre was one written by d'Argenson when the struggle was at its height. It is in the form of a letter from an Englishman to a Frenchman.[2] In the course of it he says:

"Wherever the sovereignty may reside, it is necessary that authority should be entire, without partition, and should bow to the judgments of God alone." He proceeds to urge the necessity of doing away with the superior courts, or of placing them absolutely at the disposal of the Crown. In replying to the objection that that would establish "a veritable Turkish government," he reveals the secret of his peculiar attitude with regard to royalty in France. "What of it?" he rejoins. "You live in France under a despotic authority. The die is cast, so to speak. You must either obey it or destroy it entirely." Its only restraint must be that imposed by "opinion, reason, delicacy, public spirit. Is it not the case that for two centuries the progress of authority in France has been that of peace, art, and morality, and is it not increasingly active in suppressing violence, whether public or private?"

How far d'Argenson is to be credited with the

[1] 181. [2] 182.

policy adopted is a secret which is buried with Chauvelin and Fleury. Had he been the moving spirit in the government, its measures could not have been in stricter conformity with his advice. By a declaration of the 18th of August, appeals were withdrawn from the jurisdiction of the Parlement, and the chambers of Inquests and Requests were suspended. A "Lit de Justice" followed on the 2nd of September, and upon the 7th the chambers of Inquests and Requests were scattered to the four winds.[1]

This policy, which d'Argenson had perhaps inspired, was not consistently pursued. It was not for the last time that Chauvelin had betrayed the Cardinal into bold and decisive action, nor the last time that Fleury regretted it. His will was absolute, and before three months had elapsed the declaration and the *lettres de cachet* were withdrawn, and the Parlement returned in triumph.

In dealing with d'Argenson's action as Minister, it has been usual to attribute its strange inconsequence to his own weakness and oscillation of mind. The indictment is a hazardous one to prefer against the son of Marc René d'Argenson; and here it is only necessary to say that in nothing that he ever wrote or did has there appeared to be sufficient ground for it. There seem to have been few men who have formed their ideas with a more quick decision, or have clung to them with a more sane tenacity. His mind cut into the interests which engaged it sharp and clear as a diamond;

[1] 183.

the very fault of it was that it was incapable of those politic shifts, those timely irresolutions, which have often been the making of smaller men. Indeed, there is even ground for suggesting that if, in judging the events of d'Argenson's ministry, his own real share in them be scrupulously weighed, there may remain no reason to reject the opinion formed of him, in the beginning of their relations, by one of the ablest men of his own day, the Warden of the Seals himself. It is worth remarking that at this very time Chauvelin was so impressed with his intrepidity of mind that he thought of him as a possible premier president of the Vacation Chamber, designed to supersede the Parlement ;[1] in other words, as the foremost instrument of the stringent measures contemplated by the Crown and the most conspicuous target of a virulent Opposition.

Nor is this the only reply to an imputation which the mere turning of d'Argenson's pages might almost suffice to dissipate.

Why, it may be asked, was this offer not accepted? D'Argenson himself shall furnish the answer, surely as pathetic as it is fatally true. He shrank at Chauvelin's suggestion, protesting that " at bottom he must be aware of my defects, and that, besides several others, I had that of being what is called shy and timid ; I had been badly brought up ; my father, when I was young, had given all the preference to my brother ;[2] he had only known me during the last two years of his life when I was in

[1] 184. [2] 185.

the public service." Upon a word of deprecation, he repeated "it had not been the case in the latter time, and when he once knew me, the matter changed completely." [1]

Indeed his new patron could not help regarding him with interest, and at the same time with embarrassment. He never tired of urging him to conquer the weakness which dogged his life. He invited him to his house, "where all France crowded," and asked him to regard it as his own; [2] he exhorted him to lose no opportunity of making himself at home with the world and the Court. He said "that before all things it was necessary to rescue me from the position in which I was, from a sort of obscurity." [3] His counsels were as assiduous as they were disinterested; [4] and they were at last heard with impatience by the man who felt that the power to follow them had passed for ever beyond his reach.

"But," he represented at last, "provided that I am known to you, and to the King and the Cardinal, as I see I am known to his Eminence, and as you have told me I am to his Majesty, what does it matter whether I am known to the rest?" [5]

Indeed he felt such dependence to be his one resource. Some years afterwards he was called to what was, in the circumstances of the moment, the most important post in the French Government, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He brought to the proof a devotion to the King which had been the growth of generations; he placed at his service a

[1] 186. [2] 187. [3] 188. [4] 189. [5] 190.

ripe wisdom, a capacity for firm, constructive statesmanship, such as few of the ministers of the reign possessed. All he asked was a free hand, and firm and kingly support; for he knew that he could not have maintained himself for an hour amid the clang of policies and the machinations of intrigue. He threw himself proudly and confidently upon the loyalty of the King. He only learnt that the staff on which he leaned was a bruised reed when it went into his hand and pierced it.

It was to no mistiness of mind or constitutional indecision that the vagaries of his ministry were due; but simply to the fact that his voice was drowned by the clamour of the Council, and his position sacrificed by the desertion of the King.

D'Argenson could not fail to attract remark, but he was not strong enough to make himself necessary. Chauvelin had received him with curiosity and unfeigned regard; but after a time he lost the freshness of originality, and his shrinking eccentricity alone remained. The Minister treated him not unkindly. He put him off with promises, and was lavish of countenance and encouragement; and d'Argenson passed a couple of years in continual expectation of preferment, and in constant labour in the directions suggested by his patron. It was at this time that he began those researches upon foreign politics which were afterwards to prove so fruitful; and his Journal is henceforth enriched with discussions of the interests of France abroad, interesting in themselves, and often admirable for breadth and originality of view. They

suggest that though d'Argenson may have been a student and a recluse, a pedant he certainly was not. One of them, presented to Chauvelin in 1734 in the form of a memoir, enables us to bring into just focus the relations between d'Argenson and his political mentor. It was criticised with his usual directness and vigour by St. Pierre, who, after pointing out its faults and admonishing the author, exhorts him not to be discouraged. "At your age," he says," [1] "I was very far from thinking so profoundly upon public affairs," and he predicts a brilliant future as the reward of his perseverance. It is in mentioning this same memoir that d'Argenson sums his opinion, repeatedly expressed, of the man who had been so long his friend. "No one knows this admirable citizen, and he does not even know himself. He has given to the public a number of his political works; he has his eyes fixed upon a goal too far removed from us; and so it happens that he repeats himself, is always harping upon the same themes, and is not appreciated. For all that, he is deeply versed in modern history, present and past; he is an able man; and he has given himself up to a branch of philosophy, profound and abandoned by all the world, namely, the true method of political action most conducive to human happiness." [2]

It was no such fate that d'Argenson designed for himself; and with keen anxiety did he watch for an opening which would enable him to reap the

[1] 191. [2] 192.

fruit of his researches. For a long time he had been secure in the friendship of the minister; but that resource appeared to be failing him; nor was he reasssured by his keen-witted brother, who warned him that Chauvelin spent his days in a continual course of duplicity. D'Argenson's apprehensions were soon confirmed. In July, 1734, upon rumours of a congress to arrange the preliminaries of peace, he offered to act as one of the plenipotentiaries.[1] His services were declined. The same fate awaited a request preferred by him shortly afterwards in favour of a relative. "I was mortified, and I see that I was only agreeable and accredited at the Court, in so far as I was useful; c'est un commerce!" he exclaims, flinging down his pen in disgust.[2] He took it up again to write to Chauvelin, informing him that there were some estates for sale in Touraine, of which the minister might be glad to have the refusal. He received in reply a letter[3] which, considering their former friendship, seems cruelly cold. It is barbed with that icy politeness with which one declines an intimacy no longer desired. In November the refusal of some vacant places which he had a right to expect, and which had been directly promised,[4] sufficed to complete his discomfiture; he could see but the wreck of those ambitions which had charged his Journal with energy and fire; and throughout the year 1735, the silence of disillusion is scarcely broken.

Not the least of d'Argenson's embarrassments[5]

[1] 193. [2] 194. [3] 195. [4] 196. [5] 197.

had come from a quarter where a happier man would have found but help and encouragement. It was in the course of the year 1733 that the relations between d'Argenson and his wife ended, by mutual consent, in a judicial separation.[1] As the conduct of the husband has given rise to animadversions which are often more true than charitable, it may be worth while to dwell upon it for a moment. D'Argenson had been married in the winter of 1718[2] to Mademoiselle Méliand, daughter of the Intendant of Lille. The passive form is used advisedly, for the transaction was arranged between the two families like the transfer of land;[3] and d'Argenson was only introduced to his betrothed a few days before the ceremony took place. The lady who became his wife "would be fifteen next January";[4] and d'Argenson, as we learn from some amusing letters to Madame de Balleroy, was not a little embarrassed by his new *rôle* of "elderly husband."[5] Notwithstanding, he accepted it with dutiful complaisance; and for some years his attitude towards his young wife was one of affectionate loyalty, not ungraced by a certain kindly amusement. About the time of their return from Valenciennes, the relations between them changed for the worse. Madame d'Argenson was a woman in fact as in name; her character had developed, and she proved to be a person of average brain and strong nerve, the very antithesis of her husband. Circumstances were not wanting to sharpen these radical differ-

[1] 198. [2] 199. [3] 200. [4] 201. [5] 202.

ences of character, and to provide occasions of offence. Her husband's affairs were in disorder,[1] and his political success was long in coming; while the philosophy which was to him excuse and consolation kindled in his wife but impatient scorn. She took upon herself the cares of the household, regarding herself, and possibly not without reason, as its sole support; while her husband chafed against a solicitude which he looked upon as mere vexatious interference.[2] A conservative in these matters as in so many more, he probably told her that a wife who was worth anything would know her place, and she may have replied that she had indeed good reason to know it only too well. She held ideas upon it which raise one's opinion of her, and which were very unusual in her day. "It is this too," says her husband, "which has led her to affect an air of absolute independence. She has formed a narrow-minded conception of all that concerns the proper submission of a wife, and she is up in arms against everything which detracts from the position of women in the world. She has far too exalted an idea of the dignity of the mistress of a house, and thinks very little of that of the master,"[3] etc. The position at last became unbearable; and Madame d'Argenson resolved to defy that sacred tradition which guarded legal relationship in old French families, and to look forward to "a position of scandal as one would long for Paradise." Her will was inflexible; the se aration took place, and one at least of the

[1] 203. [2] 204. [3] 205.

parties profited by it to return to a better mind. D'Argenson, looking back upon his married life, writes of it as reasonably and contritely as a man can do when he regrets the past and is sorry for his own share in it. In speaking of the separation, he says that "the world has done me the justice to believe that I had not deserved it, that I did everything I could to avoid it, and that I acted in the matter with a good feeling and generosity seldom met with."[1] For the truth of that statement we have the written testimony of Madame d'Argenson's own counsel;[2] and it is surely her husband's only reparation, as it is his best excuse, that for three and twenty years he loyally fulfilled the burdensome obligations which his own past misdoing may have contributed to entail.

By the beginning of 1736, d'Argenson appears to have taken fresh heart; for his Journal is resumed, and with it the interest of the ministry in him. He is spoken of now as a possible Minister of War, again as a Premier President of the Parlement of Paris, and then as the representative of France in Portugal. One report is of curious interest. It mentioned him as the first minister of Stanislas in Lorraine. The "république de Platon," for which d'Argenson was destined by Voltaire, would have been unwontedly near the earth had his friend become "Secretary of State" to the first of the bourgeois kings.[3] Upon this occasion at least, rumour was not without foundation; the intention to appoint him to Lisbon was tacitly acknowledged;[4]

[1] 206. [2] 207. [3] 208. [4] 209

and in November, he was roundly taken to task by Chauvelin for having been indiscreet enough to mention it to his brother.[1]

The appointment had not yet been ratified when an event occurred which had a lasting influence upon d'Argenson's life. On the 20th of February, 1737, after a month of ominous rumours, Chauvelin was disgraced.[2] The cause of his fall, ostensibly some obscure intrigue with the King of Sardinia, was really the discovery of an attempt to secure himself at Court independently of the Cardinal.[3] Some remarks which d'Argenson devoted to the incident, reflect in brief the tone of his Journal, and exhibit the writer in his most characteristic mood. After speaking of Chauvelin as "the scape-goat" of the ministry, and attributing his fall to an exaggeration of finesse, he goes on to observe, "With regard to that, there is no denying that his ideas are too great and lofty for the State." . . . "I am not very sorry that he is no longer our Minister; for I only care for a bourgeois policy, by which one lives on good terms with one's neighbours and is content to arbitrate between them; and so may have a long time to work consistently for the prosperity of the interior and the happiness of every Frenchman."[4] His satisfaction was not wholly unalloyed. "I cannot help regretting the loss of such a fine opportunity of expelling for ever from Italy the Emperors of Germany. There can be no doubt that it was possible; and we should have had all Europe behind us if, acting with frank

[1] 210. [2] 211. [3] 212. [4] 213.

good faith, we had strengthened the lesser powers with the spoils of the House of Austria in Italy, without attempting in any way to secure them for the House of Bourbon. We had only to make this resolution understood at Madrid by some one who knew his own mind, and who would say to them once for all, 'Will you have all or nothing?' in order to give to Spain the Two Sicilies, which has been done by arrangement; or, if the worst came to the worst, to form a general league to act against Spain and the Emperor combined. For what better view could there be than that of giving prosperity to Italy, and banishing war for ever from the peninsula." [1] D'Argenson's regret is almost passionate. "I will say more. His Eminence will be ever answerable before God for having lost this opportunity, only obtained at the cost of so much blood. The effort, fruitless though it has been, has perhaps quenched our star." [2]

Together with the seals, Chauvelin had held the portfolio of Foreign Affairs; and with regard to it d'Argenson writes:—

"The Foreign Ministry is still a-begging. I did not ask for it, but it has been done on my behalf. At first my principal care was to avoid the self-reproach of doing anything which should savour of satisfaction at my friend's disgrace. For this I have not only the testimony of my conscience, but also of M. Chauvelin. The poor man writes to tell

[1] 214. [2] 215.

me he has one consolation in that I am now known for what I am worth.

"I am worth little, but I burn with love for the happiness of my fellow-citizens; and if that were known, I should certainly be desired in office." [1]

About the same time he speaks of Count d'Argenson, who, with very little regard for the happiness of his fellow-citizens, was very much more successful. "Le cadet" had just been appointed Director of the Press,[2] and d'Argenson writes:—

"Here is my brother, who has thrown himself for all he is worth into the party of the Molinists. What a pity it is that a brother of mine should think only of himself, should desire nothing but for himself, should be in everything the centre of his circle! Such a passion excludes public spirit. It leaves no room for that love of the common good, which one should long for after one's simple happiness, and far before one's own aggrandisement; for what folly is grandeur, and the thirst for power! . . . For the remarkable thing is that my brother cares more for a place which comes to him through an underground channel, through a party and through an intrigue, than by the way, simple and noble though it be, of capacity recognised and employed." [3] Which was all very true, and at all of which that amiable sceptic would have laughed good-naturedly.

If the strait and narrow way was a little arduous, it was none the less resolutely pursued; and in April, 1737, d'Argenson was able to write: "To-

[1] 216. [2] 217. [3] 218.

day has been a great day for me. The King has appointed me his ambassador in Portugal." [1] The charge, in the circumstances of the moment, might well have been an important one; and it was gratefully undertaken as a step to higher things.

"My whole design, in accepting the post which the King has just conferred upon me, has been to fit myself and to render myself eligible for office in the Ministry." [2] In the elation of the moment, he reviews his chances of succeeding to the Chancellorship, which promised to become vacant by the withdrawal of D'Aguesseau. "Now, at the King's age and in the circumstances of the reign, the man who becomes Chancellor with the cognisance of affairs of state, might well become first minister, by reason of the priority of rank which his office bestows. Et voilà comme on se laisse aller à des pensées ambitieuses!" the philosopher concludes,[3] with that characteristic laugh at his own weaknesses.

D'Argenson's intimacy with the fallen minister had awakened some misgivings in the mind of the Cardinal; and the new ambassador takes occasion to remark: "With regard to all that, my course is very easy; simplicity and straightforwardness will always be my warrant against the suspicion of such connections, with which my name has never been mixed up." [4]

It is curious that the man who wrote these words should have been on the threshold of a period when his prime interest and most active

[1] 219. [2] 220. [3] 221. [4] 222.

concern was centred in a labyrinth of Court intrigue. For about six years he was absorbed and immersed in the designs directed by a party at Court against the influence of Cardinal Fleury. Of all the pages of his Journal, the volume and a half in which this period is embraced is the least admirable and the least attractive; for the man is keenly interested in the issue of the struggle; not an incident or a detour escapes him; and we have an almost daily record of hopes and plans and futile ambitions, sometimes outbreaks of revolting spleen, set down in pages which are as difficult to read in cold blood as they were easy to write in heat. There is no question that the tone of hard hostility which criticism of d'Argenson has so often assumed, is explained, if it is not warranted, by the revelations of this period. Even the appreciation of St. Beuve was almost quenched by their perusal when the volumes of Rathery came into his hands; and in the last of his "Causeries" devoted to d'Argenson, the luminous enthusiasm of his earlier essays is exchanged for a tone of coldness and disillusion.[1] Had the prince of critics held the strife of politics in less abhorrence, he might have seen less reason to abandon the attitude which invested his earlier essays, not only with justice, but with charm.

Appreciation of d'Argenson may be sufficiently great to justify an attempt to present these years in a light more attractive and perhaps more true than that in which they have frequently appeared.

[1] 223.

The inquiry is no unimportant one. D'Argenson has been charged, not with mere personal ambition, but with rancour awakened by personal pique. The issue will decide whether he was indeed the man that he himself imagined, or whether, with all his fine philosophy, he was really no larger than any of the men against whose littleness he inveighed.

No sooner was Chauvelin dismissed (February, 1737) than d'Argenson takes occasion to review the consequences. The Ministry is reduced to a satrapy of six, all absolutely equal, and none distinguished by remarkable ability. In a few words he sums the situation: "If a monarch prefers work to amusement, the system is good; but if he does not, one may judge of the consequences." [1] At this time he was on the best of terms with Fleury; and in April, after receiving an immediate promise of the Portuguese embassy, he quits him with the significant remark: "We should be happy if his knowledge of men were as great as his knowledge of affairs." [2] In April, his appointment was ratified; he had already acquired an extended knowledge of Portuguese affairs; and he was not without hope of counteracting the commanding influence in Portugal secured to England by the Methuen Treaty.[3] Before long, however, difficulties arose about his emoluments; and on mentioning the matter to Maurepas in July, he was not reassured by "the lively and malicious pleasure" with which his complaints were received.[4] We know that d'Argenson was in no

[1] 224. [2] 225. [3] 226. [4] 227.

position to maintain an Embassy at his own expense,[1] as Amelot, a year afterwards, had the indecency to suggest; and we know also, from the character of Fleury, that he was little inclined to deal handsomely by the men who had nothing but their ability to devote to his service. It has been far too readily assumed that the rupture of the project was due to d'Argenson's intriguing ambition, and that his protestations in regard to the Cardinal were only a blind. As we learn from a comparison of the dates, they were nothing of the sort; and true as it may be that sometime afterwards, his eagerness to set out was qualified by hopes in another direction, it is certain that in the summer of 1737, when he was solely dependent on the Cardinal and not yet in alliance with the opposition at Court, the only circumstance that retarded his departure was his difficulty in obtaining a sufficient emolument to support the dignity of an ambassador.

At this time and for long afterwards, there was no quarrel between d'Argenson and Fleury; they were, outwardly at least, upon the best of terms. But in August, 1737, a new feature begins to display itself. D'Argenson records the existence of a party at Court, whose principal instrument was the king's valet Bachelier, and whose principal object was to rouse the King to an active interest in affairs, and to strengthen the ministry by the inclusion of Belleisle, and possibly by the appointment of d'Argenson as Controller-General.[2] With

[1] 228. [2] 229.

his usual confidence and zeal, d'Argenson threw himself into line with this party. In January, 1738, he writes for the first time: "It is believed that Cardinal Fleury is nearing his end, and that he is falling into a state of lethargy; he abstains from work almost entirely;" [1] and in March, in the first of his oft-repeated speculations upon the character of the King, he writes: "In all this, there is promise of a happy reign; God send it may be! It will be this soul that we must endeavour to please, and not worthless subjects who have become kings, and who have passions of envy, pride, and mischievousness;" [2] a reference to the unhappy administration. In April, a new light breaks upon him, and he conjectures, very truly it appeared, that the moving spirit of the Court opposition was M. Chauvelin himself; his triumph is necessitated by "the horrible weakness of our present ministers." [3] All this time, d'Argenson was assured of a prominent place in the ministerial reconstruction which appeared to be imminent; and he is never tired of enlarging upon the incompetence of the men who were left to bear the weight of the Cardinal's government.

With the Cardinal himself, it is important to remember, he had at this time but one quarrel; and so late as November, 1738, he continues to write as follows: [4] "Never has any of our kings or ministers had so little knowledge of men as Cardinal Fleury. It has been the greatest misfortune which the nation has suffered under his

[1] 230. [2] 231. [3] 232. [4] 233.

ministry; for had it not been for this capital defect in any man who governs, we should have gone very far under an administrator so virtuous and so disinterested." [1] So far from an open rupture having taken place, he received from the Cardinal in January, 1739, a promise of the embassy at Naples; [2] and two months afterwards he was nominated by him to report upon a quarrel which had arisen in connection with the University.[3] At this time his alliance with the forward party at Court had lasted nearly two years; and the ground of his adhesion was not personal disappointment or private pique, but a feeling of the public necessity of strengthening the ministry by pressure brought to bear upon the Cardinal.

Six months afterwards his attitude had changed. The manifest determination of Fleury to repress every influence but his own, combined with a sudden crisis in public affairs to destroy the tone of tolerance or esteem with which d'Argenson had continued to regard him. In July, 1739, he writes: "The rumours are growing that the tyranny of the Cardinal is nearing its close. I say tyranny; for when all is said, nothing is more hateful than the government of an old tutor, without birth and without ability, eighty-six years of age, choked with self-love and with a mania for ruling, leaning on subordinates worse than himself, whom he maintains without question, and ousting his king from the government at his own will and pleasure." [4] In a letter to Chauvelin (April 24th)

[1] 234. [2] 235. [3] 236. [4] 237.

he had expressed the tone which is henceforth assumed. "Our affairs abroad continue to move only by the impetus which you have given them. As to the rest, it is left to chance, and to a star which may pale. The unity of policy is lost; general plans are treated as chimerical systems, or as 'great questions,' which certainly do create genuine terror among the smallest heads which our nation has ever seen at its own."[1]

So runs the tale for many years. General declamation against the incompetence of the ministers is exchanged for a scathing relentless impeachment of every branch of the administration. The Journal of 1739 contains some of the most terrible pictures ever drawn of the internal condition of France; and the government of the interior is arraigned with all the triumphant detail of an unanswerable indictment. When the extreme of misery had passed, there remained the vicissitudes of foreign policy to sharpen the bitterness of d'Argenson's pen. The war of the Indies, the crisis in the Empire, gave occasion for many a philippic against the senile absurdity of the Cardinal's statecraft.[2] Nor was this all; for his hand is continually upon the Cardinal's pulse; his eyes are perpetually bent upon the King; his own prospects are weighed in an ever-changing balance; and d'Argenson, King and Cardinal are canvassed until the reader is sick and weary of them all. Occasionally the narrative is divested alike of dignity and of reason; and we sometimes meet with a rude savagery of feeling

[1] 238. [2] 239.

and expression which suggest that beneath d'Argenson's usual beauty of heart there lurked unsightly possibilities.

Such are the facts, unpleasing enough; it remains to determine their critical value.

A first impression that the brain of the writer is haunted by some grotesque chimera, and that his political prospects are the pure creation of his own vanity and ambition, proves upon investigation to be false. There existed at Court during this period an active and formidable party, bent upon overthrowing the Cardinal; and for six years there was not a single month when Fleury's position might not have been imperilled by a moment of manliness on the part of the King. That moment —it was an amiable fondness—was constantly expected;[1] and had it followed upon any of the passages of d'Argenson's Journal, what appears as mere fatuous aspiration might be read as the words of truth and soberness. It is, moreover, reasonable to suggest that had the writer been more intimately conversant with the world and its ways, he would never have written one-tenth of what he felt; and that, had he not been the author of some of the loftiest and profoundest truths which political morality has ever uttered, his violences and excitements would have remained in the obscurity in which such accidents should be privileged to rest.

But there is another question involved, the question whether his criticism is the mere outcome

[1] 240.

of factious opposition, or is the wise and just conviction of a patriot and an honest man. A brief examination will suffice.

He pronounced against the men in power, and history has endorsed his verdict. Among the six ministers who carried the train of Cardinal Fleury, there was not one whose name has not to be sought for in his despatches, or who was qualified to be his own head clerk. The only man who, by the duration and the vicissitudes of his career, has secured a precarious place in history, is M. de Maurepas. So much for the men; we have yet to see whether d'Argenson's estimate of the general administration could equally boast the warrant of fact.

There are two sides to the questions suggested by the government of Fleury. There is no denying that his negative policy conferred great benefits on France; there is equally little question that it sowed the seed of many a disaster. If he did nothing to dissipate the resources of the country, he did equally little to increase them. He neglected commerce, and through the accident of the time it flourished. He neglected finance and the interior, and the ruin of the provinces proceeded unchecked. During these six years he did nothing for the policy of France abroad, and it drifted into the state in which we are soon to see it. In a word, he raised political nihilism to the dignity of a faith, and the deluge of circumstance had to be faced by his successors. His policy brought its peculiar consequences. The most striking was the decadence of the French marine. But it produced an effect

which was far less obvious, and far more insidiously fatal. With M. Chauvelin, he had banished from his ministry its only element of constructive strength. D'Argenson had been glad that the man whose "ideas were too great and lofty," was in power no longer, and only too ready to take shelter beneath the bourgeois policy of Fleury.[1] He was not long in discovering his error. The world is not a bourgeois creation, nor can it be governed upon bourgeois principles; and if genius in power is often destructive, it is none the less often necessary. It was by the consistent ostracism of genius that Fleury, in a profoundly critical period, maintained himself in power; and when his will at last succumbed to circumstance, he left his country to drift before the winds bereft of policy or guiding hand. We have soon to examine one department of the government, and that in connection with d'Argenson himself. There may be reason to suggest that if his criticism of Fleury has been violent and harsh, the conduct of French foreign policy during the years 1745 and 1746 is one long commentary upon its substantial justice. D'Argenson was a man of strange political sympathy and insight. Barbier and the element he represented, might look on with applause, and commend the Cardinal's moderation and prudence. To a patriot who had the sagacity to foresee what his so-called moderation might mean, the spectacle must have been full of provocation; and it is sufficient to conclude that if d'Argenson's narrative is deformed

[1] 241.

by the violence of exasperation, its motives were as pure as the feeling was keen.

It is with the pleasure of relief that we turn to another interest of d'Argenson's life, as sweet and engaging as the former is sometimes repellent. It presents him, not as the violent, eager partisan, but in the light of a loyal and warm-hearted friendship. It is in the spring of 1739 that we mark the beginning of his intimacy with Voltaire.

D'Argenson and he had been at school together; but since they had parted in the Rue St. Jacques [1] their ways in life had lain far apart. Arouet had been absorbed by that brilliant coterie whose host was Vendôme and whose laureate was Chaulieu; [2] while d'Argenson pursued the path of the robe, which led far away from the dazzling dissoluteness of the Temple. Nor were they thrown together more closely in maturer life; for while d'Argenson, with some chosen spirits, was developing the purely French tradition of political thought, his friend, a guest at Twickenham and Battersea, was accustoming his eyes to that foreign light which he was afterwards to diffuse so fatefully around him. About the time at which d'Argenson joined the Entresol, Voltaire set out for England.[3] Separated as they were, they retained that easy good-feeling which only school companionship can inspire. Upon Voltaire's return they met more frequently, and in their letters their old discussions upon art and politics at the house of a popular society lady,[4] are often the theme of pleasant recollection.

[1] 242. [2] 243. [3] 244. [4] 245.

It was not, however, until the opening of the correspondence whose occasion and character we have now to record, that their casual acquaintance ripened into intimacy. Many of Voltaire's letters have never been recovered; and d'Argenson's, with scarcely an exception, have perished entirely. Still, there remain enough to form an intelligible series, and to throw a very attractive light upon the character of the men concerned.

It was in the beginning of 1739 that Voltaire, incensed by a more than usually scurrilous libel, appealed to his friend for protection in an attempt to force the author [1] to a disavowal of his work. With the ready loyalty characteristic of him, d'Argenson accepted the trust; [2] and until the close of the quarrel he became the poet's "chargé d'affaires accredited to the literary police." Such of his letters as are preserved are truly charming, and they read strangely beside many a page of his Journal written at the same date. They are graced throughout by that open-hearted confidence which d'Argenson was always so ready to accord; and nothing can be sweeter than the self-congratulation with which he tells Voltaire of his success.[3] He was in constant communication with Madame du Châtelet; and d'Argenson joined Madame in a conspiracy of kindness to restrain the vivacities of their outraged friend.

Voltaire was not the man to undervalue such services. His letters are full of expressions of

[1] 246. [2] 247. [3] 248.

gratitude, as delicate as they are sincere; he cast about for a means of displaying it more amply; and with many another earnest of confidence and regard, d'Argenson received the opening chapters of the "Histoire du Siècle de Louis XIV.," and with it the assurance, "I wish to please you so much; and you will see that if I do not succeed, it is not for want of working upon subjects which are dear to you." [1] D'Argenson must have been emboldened by the confidence of his friend, for soon after, Voltaire received a letter, and with it an extract of a certain manuscript from d'Argenson's own pen.

The keen surprise and pleasure which attended its perusal are written in every line of Voltaire's reply:—

"My dear Sir, Providence has kept me here a day longer than we intended in order that I might receive the most pleasing letter that I have had since Madame du Châtelet has ceased to write. I have just been reading to her the extract you have been good enough to make for us from a work of which it may be said, more justly than of 'Télémaque,' that if any book could confer happiness upon mankind, it would be this. . . . We have not here the mere dreams of a good-hearted man, like the good Abbé de St. Pierre and M. de Fénélon; there is here something more real, and something which experience proves in the most striking manner. . . . Madame du Châtelet is enchanted with your plan. By this post I have received a

[1] 249.

letter from a prince, whose first minister you would be, if you had been born in his country." [1]

Upon earnest representations that they are "the most honest people in the world," and that they would return the book "without copying a word," the entire manuscript was forwarded to Brussels. It is acknowledged in a letter of the 21st of June: "My dear Sir, I have just finished reading a work which consoles me for the flood of bad books wherewith we are inundated. . . . How have you had the courage, you, whose house is as old as M. de Boulainvilliers', to declare so generously against him and his fiefs? That is the thing I cannot get over; you have divested yourself in favour of the public of the dearest prejudice to which men can cling. . . . Good-bye. Go and make the French loved in Portugal, and leave me the hope that I shall see again a man who does so much honour to France. An Englishman had put upon his tomb: 'Here lies the friend of Philip Sidney;' allow me to write my own epitaph: 'Here lies the friend of the Marquis d'Argenson.'" [2]

"There is a place that one does not procure for cash down, and that I merit by the most respectful attachment and the most high esteem." The last word is significant; Voltaire was attached to his friends; his esteem was reserved for his equals.

The book was kept for six weeks, when Voltaire returned by Moussinot "the best and most instructive work that I have read for twenty years.[3] . . . I am assured that the author of this unique work is

[1] 250. [2] 251. [3] 252.

not going to Lisbon [1] to bury his talents for guiding men and making them happy. May he remain at Paris, and may I find him again in one of those posts where, up to the present, so much harm has been done and so little good. If I had myself to choose, I swear that I would not set foot again in Paris until I saw M. d'Argenson in the place of his father, and at the head of letters. . . . Madame du Châtelet is as charmed as I, and will praise you to much better purpose."

Never did Voltaire speak with more enthusiasm, and never was the feeling more generous and sincere. He had suddenly discovered among a crowd of other noble protectors a man of rare and unexpected power; and for some time the letters to d'Argenson are sufficient to show that he had sensibly risen in Voltaire's esteem. The praises he received were accompanied by a full and careful criticism, the hasty reading of which may have given rise to a gratuitous impeachment of the writer's sincerity. The suggestion will be presently considered; [2] here it is enough to say that it was no ordinary political work which, in 1739, could arouse the enthusiasm of Voltaire.

A third episode in the correspondence is of some importance. It was through Voltaire that d'Argenson acquired his first knowledge of a man to whom he was afterwards introduced more intimately by events, the young Prince Royal of Prussia. Among other marks of regard, Voltaire sent him some of the prince's letters, and asked

[1] 253. [2] 254.

him to share his admiration. It may be imagined that d'Argenson, in whom devotion to royalty was hereditary, and whose regard for merit was always so keen, was not slow to echo the enthusiasm of his friend.[1] From this time forward he watched with lively and appreciative interest the development of Frederick's career, and upon the frequent letters which found their way into his hands he formed a conception of the Prince's character which was not without its influence upon future events. Its essence is contained in some words he wrote on hearing of Frederick's accession (June, 1740) :—

"Il fera ce qu'il faudra faire."[2]

His pleasure at the event is only qualified by the pitiful contrast presented by the King upon whom his hopes had so long been built.

Such are the principal features of this delightful correspondence. It was continued with more or less intermission until the end of 1744, when d'Argenson found occasion to exercise his friend's pen in matters of more than epistolary weight. Throughout the difficulties of an arduous ministry, his task was lightened and his efforts cheered by the encouragement and co-operation of Voltaire.

[1] 255. [2] 256.

IV.

November, 1744–January, 1747.

Foreign Politics—D'Argenson's Ministry—1745: The Convention of Augsburg—The Convention of Hanover—The Imperial Election—The Treaty of Dresden—1746: The Negotiation of Turin — The Saxon Marriage — Review.

At the end of 1740, d'Argenson had succeeded his brother as chancellor of the Orléans household;[1] in November 1744, he was invited to accept a place in the Government as Minister of Foreign Affairs.[2] His brother, Count d'Argenson, was already Minister of War, and since the dismissal of Amelot in April, had been signing the despatches of the Foreign Office.

The appointment of a man without any diplomatic experience or high official knowledge to what was, in the circumstances of the moment, the most important position in the Ministry, might well, at any other period, have given occasion for remark. At this time, however, the Government was peculiarly constituted; its policy was dictated by Marshal de Noailles, who had no official position; and

[1] 257. [2] 258.

all that was required of the new Minister was not plans or policies of action, but the dutiful deference and docility of his predecessor. The eyes of Noailles would have opened widely could he have read some of the pages which the new Secretary had already devoted to the principles and conduct of French foreign policy.

D'Argenson's ministry lasted rather more than two years, and came to a close in January 1747. The period was an eventful one; and our knowledge of it is derived from diplomatic correspondence in every capital in Europe. The evidence has been digested in several important works, notably the elaborate study in four volumes by the Duc de Broglie,[1] and the comprehensive monograph by M. Edgar Zevort.

These works are valuable and authoritative, but their conclusiveness may be disputed. There are many suggestions with which any one who has made a close personal study of d'Argenson may find it difficult to agree; while the divergencies of detail, and sometimes of conclusion, between the two writers, the admirably chosen series of documents given by M. Zevort, and, above all, a careful acquaintance with d'Argenson's own Journal for ten years before, suggest the necessity and afford ample scope for some independent criticism. It would seem, indeed, that these works have been undertaken primarily with a view to the general history of France; and that no adequate effort has been made to determine d'Argenson's real share in

[1] 259.

the events for which he bears the official responsibility. There is only too good reason to know that in many critical conjunctures, the foreign policy of France was only pursued because the Foreign Minister was powerless to avert it. Indeed there is reasonable ground for suspecting that no pains have been spared in comprehending everything but the Marquis d'Argenson himself; and that, if the perusal of his official despatches had been illumined by the study of his unofficial memoirs, the character of his action might have been explained more naturally than by the suggestion of stupidity or confusion of mind.

It is true that M. Zevort endeavours to illustrate d'Argenson's political principles from his own "Essai de l'exercice du tribunal européen par la France seule;" but it may very well be doubted whether this piece possesses the importance which has been attached to it. It was written shortly after, or possibly before, the fall of Chauvelin, and at least seven years before d'Argenson's accession to the Ministry. In November 1737, when it appeared in manuscript, France was at peace, Fleury was still Minister, the war between Spain and England had not broken out, the old House of Austria was not yet extinct, and Frederick was still Prince Royal of Prussia. In the interval the face of Europe had wholly changed. Moreover the "Essai" consists of no more than half-a-dozen widely printed pages, placed at the end of the 1764 edition of the "Considérations,"[1] and omitted

[1] 260.

altogether from that of 1784. It contains a few loose remarks about Russia and the northern powers, with some views upon Spain and Austria which are the commonplaces of d'Argenson's Journal. Almost the only remarkable feature are some significant words upon the position of England, which show that the shadow of 1763 was already falling across the path of France.[1] Indeed the piece appears to be really nothing more than a brief academic essay, written, as we learn from the title-page of the manuscripts in the Library of the Arsenal, as a note upon St. Pierre's "Projet de la Paix Perpétuelle."[2] That the author regarded it as of small importance is clear from his failure to exhibit in his Journal any further affection for its leading idea, the exercise of international arbitration by France alone; his subsequent criticism of Fleury is little more than a consistent denial of it; and we can point to at least one passage where its central principle is categorically rejected.[3] It is true that the conception of a benevolent arbitration exercised by France remained as a shadowy and distant ideal before d'Argenson's mind; but that it had ever any serious influence upon his practical ideas of policy there is no evidence to suggest. Even if it be admitted, with M. Zevort, that these were "the ideas, some ingenious, others chimerical, almost all beyond realisation, which d'Argenson nourished in 1737," it may be denied, with some distinctness, that "he brought them to the ministry in 1744."[4]

[1] 261. [2] 262. [3] 263. [4] 264.

It is not here, but in the pages of his Journal for ten years before, that we must search for the secret of d'Argenson's thought. It is true that the running commentary upon foreign politics which is here continued from time to time[1] is, upon a first or a casual reading, as bewildering as many have found it; but it will appear upon study and reflection, that the writer's views, many-sided as they are, revolve about half-a-dozen leading principles, which perpetually recur, are immediately recognised, and from which the author never materially swerves. These principles are based upon profound thought and mature research; and the divergence of view which is superficially apparent is due to their constant adaptation to the circumstances of the moment as affected by fortune or failure, success or reverse. There is no man to whom inconsequence of mind has been more speciously imputed than to d'Argenson, and surely none who has deserved it less.

The ideas which d'Argenson did bring to the Ministry must be set forth as briefly as clearness will allow.

He held that in the dealings of a great nation, the profoundest principle of policy was simple straightforwardness, and that France was in a condition which enabled her to apply that principle with effect.

Her legitimate expansion was already complete; she had nothing further to gain by aggression; and her statesmen should be henceforth as

[1] 265.

careful for the extension of her prosperity as they had hitherto been for the extension of her borders.

It was necessary to allay the inveterate distrust awakened in Europe by the designs of Louis XIV., and by the junction of the Bourbon houses. The alliance with Spain was of doubtful advantage; and it was the interest of France, while remaining on the most friendly terms with that power, to discountenance, and if necessary to repress, the Spanish ambitions in Italy. At the same time, every support should be given to Spain in her resistance to the commercial aggrandisement of England.

While abstaining from aggression, France, in accordance with her traditional policy, should lose no opportunity of destroying the power of the House of Austria in Germany; the death of the Emperor Charles VI. should be made the occasion for a partition of the Austrian dominions;[1] and the influence, and if need be, the arms of France, should be used in favour of the various pretenders.

Every effort should be made to strengthen the position of the smaller powers, le tiers parti, as a counterpoise to the influence of Hapsburgs and Bourbons alike; the movements of Sardinia, Bavaria, Saxony, Poland and Prussia in the direction of independence, should receive the encouragement of France.

The designs of Russia should be held in check

[1] 266.

by an defensive alliance with Sweden and Denmark.

As regards England, France should make no attempt to force the Pretender upon an unwilling people; but she should resolutely resist the efforts of England to establish a commercial monopoly, and declare war rather than allow the seizure of the Spanish colonies in America. The means were to be found in the withdrawal of Holland from English influence, support of the colonial policy of Spain, and above all, the restoration of the French marine in view of a great maritime war.

Not the least admirable object which a statesman could embrace would be the expulsion of the Austrians from Italy, and the surrender of the whole peninsula to an Italian confederation. The project in truth was an ideal one; but it was commended by its apparent ease of execution —already proved by M. Chauvelin[1]—and by the severity of the blow it would inflict upon Austria.

Behind all was the fact that the French provinces were in a critical condition ; and every livre spent in war, and every man lost in battle, were spent and lost at the expense of the provinces. The paramount need of France was ten years of peace, retrenchment, and reform.

Such are the main principles of d'Argenson's political theory. In his Journal for ten years past it is possible to watch them, not in a very meagre reduction to their lowest terms, but as in process

[1] 267.

of growth, and of adaptation to an ever-changing variety of mood and circumstance. This variety of view, at first the source of continual embarrassment, becomes at last our surest guide; for it reveals the most intimate turn of d'Argenson's thought; and it enables us to divine the aspect from which a particular question is likely to be regarded, his probable choice between alternative courses, and the principles upon which the difficulties of the moment are likely to be resolved. One further reflection the Journal suggests. The tenacity with which these leading principles are maintained is only equalled by their rapidity of adaptation and clearness of grasp; nor can we avoid the suspicion that if the action of the French Foreign Minister should appear to be characterised by a strange inconsequence, the cause is to be sought elsewhere than simply in his own bewilderment and confusion.

Before proceeding to consider that question, a word remains to be said about a few of the men with whom d'Argenson was soon to be engaged. He was already well known in the diplomatic circle at Paris, and with two, at least, of its leading members he was upon intimate terms. One of them was the Marquis de Valori, the French envoy at Berlin, whom d'Argenson had introduced to Voltaire as early as 1739;[1] the other was the ambassador of Holland, M. van Hoey. Van Hoey was a man after d'Argenson's own heart. He sought, in sympathy with his friend, to raise the tone of politics, its huckstering pettiness of means

[1] 268.

and motives, by a certain philosophy of his own, a philosophy which is not more visionary than most things good, nor more ridiculous than most things noble, but with which the man of the world will refuse to meddle, and at which "le peuple petit-maître," in d'Argenson's words,[1] will go on laughing to the end of time. Before the minister had attained his present position, Van Hoey had esteemed his person and valued his advice; and in the previous year (1743) he had even transmitted to the Hague a long account of a conversation with "un seigneur," whom no one who has read a hundred pages of d'Argenson's writing will have any difficulty in identifying.[2]

There was another personage in the forefront of politics, whose career d'Argenson had not watched in vain. The Prince Royal of Prussia had gone far since the spring of 1739, when the friend of Voltaire was privileged to receive his letters. Time had made little impression upon d'Argenson's first estimate of him. He admired his devotion and his strength of character; and he had even some kindness for that 'splendid mendacity' to which Anti-Machiavel had been converted by events. It was to no childish sentiment of hero-worship that his regard was due; but to a firm and surely reasonable conviction that Frederick was strong enough to afford to be honest, that such a man did not make engagements which he would be glad to repudiate, or break his word when he could possibly help it. He felt that now, as at Frederick's

[1] 269. [2] 270.

accession,[1] his interests were coincident with those of France; and that the King of Prussia had only to be treated with honesty and supported well, to prove the soundest ally in Europe.

On the 15th of November, 1744, a proclamation was issued[2] directing a general thanksgiving for the capture of Fribourg, the recovery of the King, and the successes of the late campaign. Three days afterwards d'Argenson became Minister of Foreign Affairs.

The fall of Fribourg closed the events of the year in Alsace. Thither in August the King had hurried from Flanders upon hearing that as Frederick had predicted, the Austrians, under Prince Charles of Lorraine, had crossed the Rhine and were ravaging French territory. Louis had no sooner arrived than he was stricken down with fever at Metz; while, through the culpable negligence of his generals Noailles and Coigny, the Prince of Lorraine had been allowed to escape and to join the resistance to Frederick, who had again drawn the sword against Maria Theresa, and had fulfilled his promise of the Treaty of Frankfort (1st June, 1744) by a dashing descent upon Bohemia. His communications were threatened by the return of Prince Charles; Prague was evacuated by the Prussians, and Frederick withdrew with all his forces into Silesia. He was weary of the war, which had long been utterly objectless; he saw clearly enough that its further prolongation could only postpone what it could not prevent, the

[1] 271. [2] 272.

eventual triumph of Maria Theresa; he would have been glad to escape upon any terms which would leave him in possession of his hard won conquest. On the 26th of November he wrote to Louis XV., suggesting that negotiations for peace should be set on foot, demanding nothing for himself, and proposing as a basis the cession of Upper Austria, and the recognition of the Emperor by Maria Theresa.[1]

To this overture d'Argenson drafted a reply (December 17th). France, rivalling Frederick in disinterestedness, would be content to provide equitably for her allies, would renounce her own conquests in Flanders, and accept the mediation of Saxony. Over this draft was written, "N' a point servi." D'Argenson, taken aback, and feeling it necessary to make sure of his ground, requested the King to inform him definitely of his attitude on the question of peace. In reply he received (December 23rd), a memorandum,[2] in which the King expressed his desire for peace, deprecated any positive negotiation, and declared that the most direct way of realising his desire would be by "the most vigorous war." On the same day Louis wrote to Frederick,[3] discussing the proposals of the latter, and marking not the least eagerness to second his pacific designs.

D'Argenson was by no means blind to the meaning of the King's memorandum. "If the King was animated by the desire for peace, he was still more so by the love of glory;"[4] he had just

[1] 273. [2] 274. [3] 275. [4] 276.

made his first campaign under the auspices of Madame de Châteauroux; and he looked forward to recovering in Flanders the easy laurels which had been snatched from him in the previous year.[1] D'Argenson feared for the result. His view of the interest of France was wise and clear. The attempt to humble the House of Austria had failed;[2] "peace, no matter how it came, was now the principal object;"[3] the best means of securing it was "to stand upon the defensive in every quarter with foresight and success."[4] In this way the Queen of Hungary would be convinced of the hopelessness of her plans of vengeance, and the opinion of the peace party in the several courts would have time to make itself felt.[5]

Accordingly, "*a few days after*" receiving the King's memorandum, d'Argenson presented to him a memoir, his reference to which is of the first importance. He proposed that France should confine herself to "*a simple defensive in Flanders, not only for fear of raising a dangerous storm in that quarter, but in order to throw more weight upon the two other theatres of war, Germany and Italy. It was in these directions that the chief objects lay; and so far from being able to carry all before us, we were not even sure of holding our ground. It was in Germany that the Queen of Hungary was concentrating her principal forces, while she left to the maritime powers the task of defending the Low Countries. In Italy we required to be superior to the Spaniards, in order to direct*

[1] 277. [2] 278. [3] 279. [4] 280. [5] 281.

them well."[1] So far as d'Argenson personally is concerned, the above appears to be the most valuable record to be found in his ministerial memoirs.

On the 26th of December and the 4th and 8th of January, three letters were written by Frederick,[2] which show that events are moving rapidly. He declares that if negotiations are to be undertaken, it must be done at once;[3] that he has himself to deal with twenty thousand Hungarians in Upper Silesia;[4] that a strong detachment of Prince Charles's army is on the confines of Bavaria;[5] and that events of gravity are only to be averted by the reinforcement of the army of the Lower Rhine, and the despatch of immediate and effective succour to the Emperor and the Bavarian army. "At the present moment, these two positions appear to me of capital importance. They are no slight reverses of which we are running the risk, but the frustration of all our present measures, and even of those for the coming campaign" (January 8, 1745).[6]

The reception which awaited these representations is significant. In the first days of January, an Austrian force, after repulsing a weak French detachment, established itself upon Bavarian territory.[7] At that very moment the Emperor, in reply to his prayers and entreaties, received a letter[8] (January 2nd), in which the French King, with manifest impatience, declared himself unable to satisfy his demands. Upon the 9th Louis, in

[1] 282. [2] 283. [3] 284. [4] 285. [5] 286. [6] 287. [7] 288. [8] 289.

a reply to Frederick, asserted that there was no reason to believe that an Austrian advance was imminent,[1] and declined to pursue further the steps taken in the direction of peace. The letter is described as "très froide et très maladroite" (Zevort).[2]

The inference implied throughout the preceding appears explicitly in a letter to Frederick of the 19th of January. Drafted by d'Argenson, it was revised and signed by Louis XV. The two hands and the two policies are apparent in every line. "Our union, our strength and our efforts," d'Argenson wrote, "give us promise of victory and peace." Under the hand of the King it became "must give us victory." As to Bavaria and the Lower Rhine, "I am thinking of these two objects;" Louis appended, "without forgetting Flanders." To the last line this odd dualism is continued.[3]

This letter was written on the 19th of January. On the following day a new chapter was opened with the death of the Emperor Charles VII., after an illness of twenty-four hours.[4] So far, two months of d'Argenson's ministry have elapsed. Their history has revealed one fact with impressive clearness. Upon the question of peace and the question of war, there is a radical divergence of principle and policy between the French Government and the French Minister. The King will listen to no overtures which may thwart his desire of overrunning Flanders. D'Argenson is earnestly

[1] 290. [2] 291. [3] 292. [4] 293.

desirous of peace, to be secured by a strong defensive campaign in Germany. Which was the wiser will soon appear.

The death of the Emperor (January 20, 1745) was perhaps one of the most terrible blows which French policy has ever sustained. It came at a moment when fortune had turned to the side of the Austrians, and when every step lost by France was a tenfold gain to Maria Theresa.

Louis XV. had been disposed for war; he found that he had no longer the power to choose. It is true that for the French ministry there were two conceivable courses; but only one was practically open. It was conceivably possible to make terms with Maria Theresa, and to use the death of the Emperor as an excuse for withdrawing from the war. Such doubtless was the view of the trampled German populations and of the tax-burdened householder of the faubourgs; but it could only be maintained by sacrificing every principle of honour and policy, and by ignoring the only considerations which would weigh for a moment either with Louis XV. or Maria Theresa.

For the French King the course was marked out with terrible clearness. He had combined with other powers to rend the inheritance of a defenceless woman; and now, when that woman had faced him, uncrowned but veritably imperial, to beg forgiveness on his knees—the very thought was impossible. Nor could the King of France yet bow before his former vassal of Lorraine. Even if his enemy deigned to listen to him, he

would have to take or leave humiliating terms; and it would be a cold return for that generous ubilation with which his people had greeted him a year before. But not only were his own honour and popularity concerned; there was another motive, to which he perhaps may have been less sensible. To accept a peace upon any such terms as Maria Theresa would be willing to grant would have been to inflict a blow upon the future of French foreign policy, from which it might not recover for half a century or more. The last would have been seen of French influence in Central Europe: the upstart of Brandenburg would be swept into the sea: two centuries of effort might be totally erased: and Maria Theresa would resume the throne from which Charles V. had descended. If not to the King, to d'Argenson at least, such a prospect was at once conclusive.[1]

And when looked at from Vienna, peace was equally distant. As well seek to recall a falcon striking its prey as to breathe of peace to Maria Theresa. A statesman to her finger-tips, she saw at once that the two objectives of the next campaign were Frankfort and Breslau. Her armies were already on the plains of Breslau: her armies were within striking distance of Frankfort: if but for a few months the breeze would hold, the Flemish towns might fall to whom they pleased. And the path of victory was the path of vengeance. She regarded the man who had failed to wrong her, not, as is said, with the spleen of a woman,

[1] 294.

but with the proud wrath of a queen; she had not forgotten that he had driven her from her capital, and forced her to throw herself on the generosity of the men her own fathers had oppressed; nor would she have been slow to tender him the bitter cup from which she had drunk.

She might indeed have listened to him upon one condition—the abandonment of Frederick to her vengeance. In June last she had sworn that she would never lower her sword against the man who had torn up the Treaty of Breslau, until her generals could dictate terms to him from Breslau. Proposals on behalf of Frederick—she would have trampled upon them, as she trampled upon the Treaty of Hanover in August, when presented to her by her ally of England. In a word, the French King had to choose between indelible dishonour and the disdainful rejection of his terms.

If these reasons were decisive to the King, they were not less so to d'Argenson himself.[1] No man longed so much as he for peace; but he was not prepared to purchase it with the humiliation of his country, and with the undreamed aggrandisement of that hated House against which, all his life, he had consistently inveighed. The provinces were henceforth to be beaten with scorpions; for the efforts of France had been as nothing to that which the new enterprise would involve. Yet cost what it might, the effort must be made; and d'Argenson was at one with the Council[2] in the hope that by a single brilliant and advantageous

[1] 295. [2] 296.

campaign, France and Frederick might establish a position from which an honourable peace could be obtained.

The first necessity was to restore to their cause the moral basis which had been struck from beneath it by the death of the Emperor. Henceforth the pretext—for it proved to be little more—was to vindicate the liberty of election, and to support a candidate acceptable to the Electors. For the candidature of the Empire, the choice fell upon Augustus III., Elector of Saxony and King of Poland, who at this very time (January, 1745) was negotiating a secret treaty with Maria Theresa.

At this juncture, whatever may be said of it afterwards, the Government acted with promptitude and determination. Before ten days had elapsed, the position which seemed to Frederick "une crise terrible" had been faced, the débris of a great policy had been swept to one side, and before a courier could go and come between Paris and Berlin, the new measures contemplated by the French Government were announced to Frederick.

In a letter of the 31st of January—if not before it—d'Argenson declared that "at the present moment the very idea of peace must be forgotten," and the most strenuous steps must be taken to secure the alliance of the King of Poland.[1] This policy was reiterated in letters of the 1st and 4th of February;[2] and from now until the eve of the election at Frankfort, a desperate effort was main-

[1] 297. [2] 298.

tained to induce Augustus to abandon Austria, and to declare himself a candidate for the Empire.

The conduct of the negotiations fell into the hands of d'Argenson. His own share in the policy is difficult to determine. He knew there was really no choice; but he could not help seeing that on every side it was beset with difficulties. It was true that the King of Poland could scarcely resist the magnificent prize held out to him; and it was not to be supposed that mere personal animosities could obliterate every consideration of interest and honour. In that view the Minister concurred with the Council; and he was supported by Valori,[1] the French envoy at Berlin, who was deputed to approach the Court of Dresden. To French statesmen the opinion was just and natural enough.

Yet d'Argenson at least, though he viewed them undaunted, was by no means blind to the difficulties in the way. The jealousy of Russia in regard to Poland, the formidable rage of the Queen of Hungary, and above all, his hatred and jealousy of the King of Prussia, would all combine to deter Augustus from committing himself in the interest of France. Indeed so small was d'Argenson's confidence of success, that he was unwilling to follow the Council in their resolution to subsidise the King of Poland, and to guarantee to him by treaty an accession of territory to be obtained at the cost of Maria Theresa.[2] However unpromising, the negotiation had to be begun; there

[1] 299. [2] 300.

was no alternative; and if it came to nothing more, it would at least give time for the development of a campaign, and for the armies of France and Prussia to achieve a position which would serve as the basis of an honourable peace.[1]

If at Paris the plan seemed practicable enough, at Berlin it was regarded from a very different standpoint. French statesmen could consider nothing but the strength of their four armies, the excellence of their intentions, and the splendour of the position to which Augustus would be raised by the arms of France and Prussia. To Frederick the matter presented itself in a less encouraging light. He knew his neighbour of Saxony; he knew that Augustus had no resources of his own; that his ministers were in sympathy with Austria and in the pay of England; and that what might leave Paris as the offer of an empire would reach Dresden as nothing more than an invitation to Augustus to throw over a sound alliance, to place himself at the mercy and become the tool of a covert enemy and a doubtful friend, and in a word, to resume the position from which Charles VII. had been happily liberated by death. Frederick saw at once that the French policy was foredoomed, and he did his best to impress upon the cabinet the fruitlessness of its task.[2] Finding his representations received as merely the suggestions of prejudice and jealousy, he had no alternative but to give way; and on the 13th of February[3] he announces that he has "buried his resentment,"

[1] 301. [2] 302. [3] 303.

and sanctioned the departure of Valori for Dresden. Frederick was perfectly confident that Valori could only fail;[1] and he felt that any apparent success which he might gain, would be by no means useless in another direction in which his own efforts were actively engaged.[2]

If the hopes of France were illusory and her policy unsound, they were certainly not more so than the course which Frederick had himself adopted. On the 26th of January, before any definite communication had reached him from the French Government, he had instructed his representatives to sound the ministers at London and the Hague;[3] for a consideration received he offered to withdraw from the war, and to co-operate in the election of the Grand Duke. His agents were instructed to press these proposals.

That Frederick could have had any real confidence in these measures, it is difficult to believe. It is true that in England the Hanoverian party was no longer in power; but George II. was bent upon the war, and Carteret's influence was still supreme; moreover, popular feeling, while demanding a change in the direction of the war, was by no means in favour of its abandonment. Whatever the dispositions of the English ministry, from Maria Theresa there was nothing to hope. Indeed the whole plan was a counsel of despair. Frederick had everything to gain and absolutely nothing to offer; he had incensed the whole of the Austrian party; and if there were no motives of

[1] 304. [2] 305. [3] 306.

interest to aid him, he could scarcely trust to motives of charity. Indeed the whole situation is summed up in some words of Chesterfield to the Prussian minister at the Hague: "I understand," he said, "the truth is you ask everything and you offer nothing, for Silesia is no longer yours, since you have yourselves torn up the treaty which gave it you." [1]

It is easy to see the very natural motives which actuated Frederick in the adoption of his policy.[2] On the 31st of January, before the measures contemplated by the French Government had yet been communicated to him, he wrote to Louis XV. describing the position of their cause in Germany in terms of very real concern. He spoke of the utter dejection into which their allies had been plunged by the death of the Emperor, and of the favourable positions secured by the Austrian party; and he declared that only by the immediate reinforcement of the French army in Bavaria could the young Elector be prevented from "throwing himself into the arms of the Queen of Hungary."

It was probably with some surprise and not a little relief that he received the news of the French determination to continue the war.[3] He was already, as we have seen, in communication with London and the Hague; but he could not help feeling how slender was his hope in the intervention of the maritime powers; and he was wise enough to know that peace, when it came, would

[1] 307. [2] 308. [3] 309.

be the less precarious for being secured by a successful campaign.

That this was his feeling in the matter is clear from the attitude he maintained towards France during the next two months. While hoping desperately for the intervention of England, he neglected no opportunity of concerting measures for the future of the war. Until the re-opening of the campaign in Flanders, Louis XV. was besieged with letters, memoirs, requisitions of all sorts, demonstrating with unfaltering precision the critical positions which had to be maintained, and insisting upon the only measures by which the French policy could be carried to success, and the French allies preserved from ruin. He made it clear [1] that a majority in the Electoral Diet could only be secured, and the influence of the Austrian party destroyed, by the most vigorous action on the part of the two French armies in Bavaria and on the Main.

It had not remained for the King of Prussia to indicate the only means by which the French policy could be executed or excused. Even before the death of the Emperor, as we have seen, d'Argenson had been convinced that the readiest way of obtaining peace was not by a brilliant invasion of Flanders, but by a strong defensive campaign in Germany.[2] He now saw that every consideration in favour of his policy had gained tenfold in weight; and about the middle of February, probably upon hearing of Valori's difficulties

[1] 310. [2] 311.

at Dresden, he presented to the king a certain memoir setting forth a plan for the future campaign.

This memoir is of the last importance.[1] It strikes the key-note of d'Argenson's conduct during the year 1745; it illustrates, as nothing else can do, his real position in the Ministry; and it alone can explain his subsequent attitude with regard to Frederick and Prussia. As this document is very rare, and as it only exists by a fortunate accident, it will be advisable to reproduce it entirely as it stands; its meaning is too precious to be even prejudiced by an attempt at translation. No apology will be found necessary for its inclusion here. It runs:

"Sire,—*Depuis deux mois*[2] je suis assez au fait de la combinaison de nos forces sur les quatre théâtres de guerre où V.M. a des armées présentement prêtes à entrer en campagne, pour critiquer les positions relativement à la politique et pour vous donner mon avis.

"Les Pays-Bas, où V.M. va commander son armée, ne sont pas l'objet principal de cette guerre; je crains que les flatteurs et les gens intéressés à faire paraître des opérations militaires plus brillantes que solides, n'ayent conseillé à préférer ce côté-là à d'autres. Vous y occuperez, il est vrai, les forces des puissances maritimes, et quelques-unes de l'Autriche; mais ce n'est qu'une diversion; et *l'on ne recourt aux diversions que quand on ne peut aller directement à l'objet principal.*

"Si V.M. y a des grands succès, je veux qu'elle puisse pénétrer sous peu en Hollande, et qu'elle châtie par là les Hollandais de leur ingrate témérité; *mais cela ne nous donnera pas la paix;* et pour comparer le présent au passé, c'est convertir la belle position que nous donna la paix de Nimègue en

[1] 312. [2] 313.

la vaine entreprise du feu roi en 1672 quand il pénétra en Hollande.

" L'année dernière, Votre Majesté ayant débuté par des conquêtes en Flandre, il fallut retourner en Allemagne. Alors c'était le passage du Rhin par le prince Charles qui y obligeait ; cette année-ci ce sera l'élévation du grand-duc comme empereur qui y forcera.

" L'objet principal est l'Allemagne ; tout en dépend, même l'établissement de l'infant don Philippe en Italie. *Pour parvenir à la paix*, Votre Majesté a trois objets à soutenir : (1) *de maintenir le roi de Prusse en Silésie ;* (2) d'empêcher l'élection du grand-duc, et de procurer l'élection de la couronne impériale au roi de Pologne avec une grande facilité ; sans quoi, *il n'en acceptera même l'idée ;* (3) un établissement pour don Philippe, quel qu'il puisse être. Pour cet effet, *il faut que nous nous soutenions puissants en Allemagne, et que nous tâchions d'y donner la main au roi de Prusse.*

" Les quatre théâtres de guerre, où opèrent nos quatre armées, sont celle de Flandre, celle de Mein, celle de Souabe, et celle d'Italie.

" Je serais d'avis que V.M. ne fît qu'une *défensive en Flandre*, sous les ordres du comte de Saxe, qui s'y entend si bien, ainsi qu'il a paru à la fin de la dernière campagne.

" *En Italie encore une défensive*, malgré ce qu'en pourront dire les Espagnols, pour bien assurer les Gênois, les mettre à l'abri de toute attaque, défendre par là le roi de Naples, et tenir en échec le roi de Sardaigne, qui même ne pourra se soutenir à la longue, s'il n'est point soutenu des Autrichiens ; et si l'on trouve jour à entamer le Piémont, qu'on y avance autant qu'on pourra ; qu'on avance dans le Milanais et le Plaisantin, si l'on peut ; *mais qu'en Allemagne nous faisions nos plus grands efforts.*

" Que Votre Majesté se porte incessamment à Strasbourg avec son équipage de guerre, pour aller ensuite commander celle des deux armées, qui promettra d'avoir le plus de succès et de sécurité pour la personne sacrée de Votre Majesté.

" *Celle du Mein*, sous les ordres du Maréchal de Maillebois, a commencé à pousser l'ennemi. Je serais d'avis qu'on lui

continuerât ce généralât. Elle pourra aller *jusqu'en Westphalie et à Hanovre. Celle de Bavière* doit être rassemblée incessamment, avec des magasins à vos dépens, puisque l'électorat de Bavière n'en peut fournir. Il faut la mettre en état de faire le siège d'Ingolstadt, resserrer nos quartiers, et *allant du Leck à Passau elle pénétrera en Autriche et donnera la main au roi de Prusse.*

"Comptez, Sire,[1] que ce puissant allié sortira de sa défensive; qu'il ira en Bohême, en Moravie, et même en Autriche, s'il se peut, quand nous lui montrerons si bonne exemple. Avec cela *Votre Majesté soutiendra ses alliances et même les augmentera.* Le Palatin, la Hesse, la Bavière nous seconderont; et *la Saxe* même, assurée de nos succès, *n'hésitera plus d'accepter la couronne impériale.* Au moins retarderons-nous cette élection, et elle sera le sceau de la paix. *Si au contraire, nous n'envisageons que la Flandre* comme objet principal, et que nous négligeons l'Allemagne, *nous perdrons tous nos alliés, les unes après les autres, et notre ennemi sera élu empereur sous nos yeux.*"[2]

There are many striking suggestions to be found in this memoir; but it may be scrutinised in vain for any evidence of that doubt, hesitation, looseness of grasp, by which d'Argenson's conduct is too readily explained; while, on the contrary, we have only to read it in the light of the measures actually taken by the French Government to detect the real foundation for those charges: and to know how much weight it is necessary to attach to them in so far as they concern the Marquis d'Argenson.

We have only to read the above memoir with any of those prepared by Frederick, and to sketch the chain of circumstances which took Louis to

[1] 314. [2] 315.

Fontenoy, to be in possession of all the threads of the long complication of 1745.

In a memoir of the 6th of March,[1] Frederick represents that if the election of the Grand Duke is to be prevented, a majority in the Electoral College must be regained; if that is to be done, the communications between Hanover and the three ecclesiastical Electorates must be severed by the vigour of the army of Maillebois; and the decisive movement must come from the army of Bavaria, which, under vigorous command, must capture Passau, march upon Vienna, and by drawing off the Austrian troops, throw open Moravia to the Prussian army. He does not mince the meaning of his proposals. "If another course is taken in this war, the King of France will reduce his allies to the necessity of withdrawing from it as best they can; for there must be a prompt end to this, and the matter must be decided one way or the other before the imperial election."[2] Frederick's communications with the French Court are one long reiteration of this demand. Never did a man plead more eloquently the cause of reason and manliness; and never was eloquence more desperately sincere.

The action, not of the French Minister, but of the French Government, is almost incredible. They had deliberately embarked upon a great policy, and they deliberately refused to take a single step by which it could be realised. All that depended on d'Argenson indeed, was done

[1] 316. [2] 317.

as strenuously as man could do it. He exhausted himself in efforts to win over the King of Poland, trampling down or shutting his eyes to the obstacles which faced him; and he never relaxed in his entreaties to Frederick to second his efforts at Dresden. "Will your Majesty consider that by this alliance, if it should ever take place, we should become absolute masters of the situation." [1] . . . "If your Majesty cannot lay aside the feelings which alienate him from the King of Poland, I see only the prospect [2] of a long war, the Grand Duke Emperor, and the Empire turned against us, whatever efforts we may make." [3]

D'Argenson might beg and entreat, and write despatches: but he was powerless to enforce his words with the weight of his little finger.[4] On the 10th of March he drafted a reply to Frederick, in which he undertook that the army of Bavaria should be reinforced and should push the war with vigour. The reply never went to Berlin; it remains marked with the words "n'a pas servi." [5] Indeed the French policy was already decided. For no political reason whatever, the King had set his heart upon a campaign in Flanders; and to that desire his own interest, the interest of his allies, and every statesmanlike consideration must of necessity yield. He was not likely to meet with resistance from Noailles, still less from Count d'Argenson or Maurepas; and the Foreign Minister stood alone in fruitless opposition to this brilliant piece of political fatuity.

[1] 318. [2] 319. [3] 320. [4] 321. [5] 322.

The effects of it were apparent already. The arms of France were paralysed in Germany in order that troops might be concentrated in Flanders; the army of Bavaria could not be reinforced; little could be done for the army of the Main; and d'Argenson, while persistently demanding ready co-operation in his overtures at Dresden, was obliged to evade and trifle with the equally persistent demands of Frederick. His position was a very thankless one; and it would have been as ridiculous as it at first would seem, had it been of his own choosing. That it was not, there is ample evidence to prove.

From this anomalous disposition of the French Government the four decisive events of the year 1745 descend in lineal succession. Each was a political disaster of the first magnitude; every one of them was richly deserved, and not one was really attributable to the Minister who has ordinarily borne the burden and the blame. Those events are—first, the loss of Bavaria; second, the Convention of Hanover; third, the election of Francis I.; and fourth, the Treaty of Dresden.

It was on the 21st of January that the young prince Maximilian succeeded to the Electorate of Bavaria; on the 19th of April he signed a convention with Maria Theresa.[1]

The Emperor on his death-bed had adjured his son to rely on the support of France;[2] and Chavigny, the French minister at Munich, was

[1] 323. [2] 324.

ready to assure him that he would never do so in vain.[1] The Austrian troops were already in Bavaria; repeated warnings were given both by Frederick and Chavigny of the critical position of the young Elector; and every means of persuasion was exhausted by Chavigny in order to secure the reinforcement of the Bavarian army. The French Government were deaf to his representations; the Council rejected d'Argenson's despatches;[2] d'Argenson himself was at last irritated at the reiteration of demands with which he had no power to comply.[3] Chavigny had to pacify the Elector with promises and assurances, in default of troops.

In the meanwhile no effort was spared by Maria Theresa to detach the Elector from the League of Frankfort.[4] Her diplomatic agents were Colloredo and Count Batthiany. Colloredo negotiated at Munich with humiliating terms of peace; Batthiany advanced upon Munich with an army eleven thousand strong, before which Ségur, with a small French force, had withdrawn to the Bavarian frontier. Accordingly, Chavigny and the Elector fled to Augsburg, where, on the 19th of April, a treaty of peace, dictated by the Austrian envoy, was signed by Maximilian.

The event of the 19th of April was the signal for what M. de Broglie himself calls "the break-up and rout of all that in a greater or less degree was still holding to France."[5] The Prince of Hesse, the Elector Palatine, the Duke of Wurtem-

[1] 325. [2] 326. [3] 327. [4] 328. [5] 329.

burg, and the Electors of Trêves and Mayence were at no pains to conceal their view that the French cause in Germany was lost; while the Elector of Saxony, Augustus himself, the very man upon whom for three months the efforts of French diplomacy had been centred, made haste to summon the troops of France to withdraw from the soil of the Empire, where there remained no excuse for their continued presence.[1]

Such was the disaster d'Argenson had foreseen and endeavoured vainly to avert. He is said[2] to have cherished with blind fatuity an unfounded faith in the fidelity of Bavaria. That faith was more than justified, if we are to believe Chavigny, who said that up to the very day when the unhappy Elector was forced to abandon his capital to the Austrians, he remained firmly attached to the French alliance.[3] The truth is this: that not only at Munich, but at Dresden and Frankfort, d'Argenson's action must appear ridiculous; because, while prosecuting his negotiations with energy and enthusiasm, he was unable, through no fault of his own, to give them the weight of a single cannon-shot. In a word, the bold policy of the 31st of January, while actively prosecuted by the French Minister, was tacitly abandoned by the French Government.

Of that fact Frederick needed no further evidence than the Convention of Augsburg. His mind was made up. He saw at once that the real object of that Government was, not the

[1] 330. [2] 331. [3] 332.

protection of German liberties, not the election of the King of Poland, not a decisive war and an honourable peace, but simply a holiday campaign in Flanders. He was utterly exasperated by the vain selfishness of the French policy, while his impatience at its continued tenderness for Saxony mounted to the brim.

"We are on the eve of a new war," he wrote to Louis XV., a fortnight after the loss of Bavaria, "and what I want to know is this: Is Your Majesty going to declare himself for a prince who is giving auxiliaries to the enemies of France, or for the man whose diversion disentangled Alsace; does Your Majesty prefer the artifices of a crafty and secret enemy to the frankness of an honest friend, who has drawn upon himself the whole burden of the war, and whose provinces are now only being ravaged in order to secure the sweets of tranquillity to the subjects who live under French dominion. In a word, I must know if the justice, the honour, the generosity of Your Majesty can consent to leave me without the real assistance which He is bound by treaties to render, and to sacrifice me to a prince who has dethroned Your Majesty's father-in-law, a prince who is sold to the enemies of France, and who is only awaiting the favourable moment to give vent to his hatred and animosity against her."[1]

He gives the French king to understand that for the purposes of the common cause, the siege of Babylon will be as useful as the siege of Tournay;[2]

[1] 333. [2] 334.

and in despair of producing any effect, he concludes :

"It is simply in the force of his own arms and in the fortune of battles that the King of Prussia puts his greatest trust, in the hope that the goodness of his cause and the valour of his troops will never fail him." [1]

He sees but one remedy for the crisis produced by the loss of Bavaria—the immediate invasion of Hanover by Conti, with the army of the Main.[2]

This advice was a marvel of astuteness. He saw that with the abandonment of France he had nothing further to hope from the war ; and that his only resource lay in bringing pressure to bear upon the maritime powers, and extricating himself as best he could. He proceeded to do so, needless to say, without the least compunction. To Frederick, the difference between the open rupture of an alliance and the tacit abandonment of an ally, was one for a casuist and not for a statesman. Events deepened his determination. Decided by the fall of Bavaria, Augustus on the 18th of May had ratified the Treaty of Warsaw arranged in January with Maria Theresa ; [3] and on the 4th of June, a combined army of Austrians and Saxons strayed into the "trap" which Frederick had spread for them at Friedbourg.[4] On the 11th of May, Louis XV. had reaped the utterly vain glory of Fontenoy ; and shortly afterwards Conti, upon the Main, received orders to detach twenty thousand men for the army of Flanders.[5] The Statesman at

[1] 335. [2] 336. [3] 337. [4] 338. [5] 339.

Vienna seized the opportunity to unite her armies in Bavaria and Franconia, and Conti, menaced by superior forces, withdrew with his troops beyond the Rhine.[1] There was not a Frenchman left in Germany; and the army of the Empress closed round Frankfort.

At the end of an ironical letter of compliment to the French king, Frederick writes (August 25th):

"It is a pity that in such a fine picture there should be one blot to spoil it a little. I speak of the retreat of the Prince of Conti. It is he who crowns the Grand Duke, and places Your Majesty's allies in a desperate and fatal position."[2]

From that position Frederick was determined to escape; but his success would have been more than doubtful, were it not that at this very moment, a critical conjunction of untoward events softened the obduracy of George II. The French advance in the Low Countries, the clamour of the peace party, and above all, the sweeping success of the gallant Prince Charles Edward, forced King George to listen to terms.[3] If the English troops were to be withdrawn from the Continent, Hanover could not be left at the mercy of Frederick; and only by the suspension of arms in Silesia, could a force be drafted from the Austrian army to relieve the English in the defence of Flanders. A determined effort was made to induce Maria Theresa to consent to a pacification. She would have nothing whatever to do with the traitor of Brandenburg; nor would she listen to any proposal which would

[1] 340. [2] 341. [3] 342.

involve the withdrawal of a single man from the Silesian frontier.[1] In the meanwhile time pressed; Charles Edward was marching on Edinburgh; and on the 26th of August, the King of England signed the Convention of Hanover, guaranteeing, for himself and his allies, the suspension of the war and the maintenance of Frederick in Silesia.[2]

If Maria Theresa had rejected, three weeks before, the proposals presented to her by her ally of England, she was not more likely to recognise the Convention signed by England upon her behalf. On the very day when Robinson, the English envoy at Vienna, endeavoured to obtain her acceptance of a treaty which snatched her enemy from her grasp, she received the news[3] that the long conflict she had maintained so manfully had ended at last in triumph, and that her husband, the Grand Duke of Tuscany, had been elected Emperor at Frankfort.

This election took place on the 3rd of September. It shattered once for all the diplomatic combinations which the labour and enthusiasm of d'Argenson had endeavoured singly to sustain. To crown the catastrophe, he was abandoned by the man tow hom everything had been sacrificed; for the King of Poland, a few days before, declared in favour of the Austrian candidate.[4] At the very moment of this palpable collapse of French in fluence in Germany, the air became heavy with rumours of the withdrawal of Frederick from the French alliance.

[1] 343. [2] 344. [3] 345. [4] 346.

It is no easy matter to determine d'Argenson's real share in these events; but it seems clear that whatever tone be assumed in regard to it, it cannot be that of harsh contempt.

At a terrible crisis in the beginning of the year, he had acquiesced in the adoption of a daring policy; he had discerned the measures by which alone that policy could be realised; and he had endeavoured, in conjunction with the greatest of the French allies, to enforce them upon his colleagues. He had seen those measures, one by one, deliberately and wantonly rejected; and the policy which could only be maintained by a couple of armies was left him to support without a single man. Inevitably his time was spent in apprehending disaster, in futile attempts to hamper its approach, and in transparent efforts, when it came at last, to give it the appearance of success.[1] In a constitutional government he might have resigned his place, declining the responsibility for measures which he had no power to control. As the minister of Louis XV., such a course was impossible. He might again have refused to pursue his negotiations at Dresden and in the several Electorates; but to have done so would have been to deprive the French intervention of its only possible pretext. A third course would have been to shrug his shoulders, tear up the policy of January last, and accept his share in the unprincipled by-play which was the only form that French diplomacy in Germany could reasonably take. He had simply to choose between

[1] 347.

acting like a knave, and looking like a fool. The qualities requisite for the former part he had never been able to acquire; and he had a profound faith that knavishness was the very last attribute of a statesman. In short, his only resource was to believe, in spite of himself, that there still remained some serious possibility of success, to shut his eyes to ominous circumstances, and to clutch at every shred of hope. By dint of trying to persuade others, he succeeded at last in persuading himself. He lost sight of the fact which had once been clear to him, that to Frederick mere protestations of confidence, with nothing to support them, were not worth the paper they were written on; and he clung to the belief that the suave indecisions of the Court of Dresden were more than a diplomatic veil for an absolute refusal. So it was that when the disasters he had foreseen occurred in due course, he found that it was less easy to accept than to apprehend the inevitable; and the Treaty of Hanover and the election at Frankfort came to him as a cruel blow. In a sorrowful letter to Marshal de Belleisle he says: "I have received your letter. As to what you say of me, I must say nothing, and with good reason; I fear your praises more than any man's, for I know your sincerity. Nevertheless, I cannot believe that I have the least capacity for affairs, where, up to the present, I have had so little success." [1]

Knowing as we do in how slight a degree d'Argenson was himself responsible for these dis-

[1] 348.

asters, we can only be impressed by the touching readiness with which he was content to accept the blame. For eight months he had been in as thankless a position as was ever occupied by mortal man. His representations had been neglected; his despatches had been revised or rejected by the Council; deprived of means, his enterprises had been doomed to failure; and it was only by his own enthusiasm and devotion that they had been maintained so long as they were. If on occasion he had been blindly credulous, there were occasions when only by blind credulity could his position be maintained at all.

It was by a courier from the headquarters of Prince Charles's army that the news of the treaty which guaranteed to Frederick a suspension of arms was conveyed to Maria Theresa.[1] She at once communicated with Count Brühl, the all-powerful favourite at Dresden. Immediately afterwards (September 10th), the Saxon minister placed in the hands of the French agent a draft of the Convention of Hanover, and gave him to understand that if France desired to be avenged upon her faithless ally, she would not be repulsed at Vienna.[2]

The French Ministry was at once placed in possession of this startling news; and it was resolved, by a majority of the Council, that negotiations should be opened at Dresden with Maria Theresa.[3] The feeling against Frederick was at fever-heat.

[1] 349. [2] 350. [3] 351.

D'Argenson's time had come at last. He had opposed without success the resolution of the Council; but his own credit had fallen with the defection of the man whose fidelity he had guaranteed. Nevertheless, he knew that persuasion was the least of his resources; and he resolved that it should be no fault of his if anything came of the overtures of the Empress.

His position is clear. It was not for nothing that for twenty years he had studied and thought upon public affairs; he was as deeply versed in the interests of the kingdom as the rest were skilled in the intrigue of the Court. The meaning of the Austrian proposals was not mistaken for an instant. Maria Theresa, roused by the thought that her enemy was escaping, had resolved to sacrifice her lesser hate; and by making terms with France, even at the cost of some of her Belgian provinces, to set free an army, forty thousand strong, for service in Silesia. D'Argenson knew the meaning of that; it would be all over with Frederick II.

The prospect suggested two questions. In the first place, Was it just? Had Frederick deserved the fate to which the French Council were ready to abandon him? D'Argenson had only to recall his correspondence with Prussia during the spring, the loss of Bavaria, and the retreat of Conti, to satisfy himself that if France had at last been abandoned by Prussia, she had only herself to blame. But there was a further consideration. Was it wise? and to that question d'Argenson

alone in the French Ministry was capable of desiring or conceiving the answer. To the rest, to Noailles or Maurepas or Count d'Argenson, the paltry personality of the month or of the moment, the time-killing, time-winning shuffle or shift, was the decisive factor in politics. D'Argenson's statesmanship had a broader base. It had regard, not to the interest of his place or to the opinion of de Pompadour, but to the interest of his country and the tradition of Richelieu. He alone could weigh the gravity of the course the Council undertook so lightly. He alone could see that so long as the Prussians remained in Breslau, France would be sure of a powerful ally, and the right hand of Austria would be paralysed in Europe; while, upon the other hand, if Frederick were compelled to bow before fate and Maria Theresa, the heiress of Austria would draw the sword of Charles V. against her own enemy and the enemy of her House. Months before, d'Argenson had revealed his feeling in one of those master-sayings of depth and directness, which only tend to strengthen the belief that his history deserves to be re-written. At a not dissimilar crisis he declared:

"We must not listen, we must not even permit a word of such a thing. If the Low Countries were offered to me, I should believe them too dearly bought at such a price as this. You have to make it clearly understood that His Majesty is resolved never to stand by and see this prince despoiled of what has been ceded to him by his treaty with the Queen of Hungary at Breslau in 1742; and that

His Majesty would prefer to surrender the dearest interests of his realm than ever consent to allow this prince to be deprived of Silesia and the county of Glatz." [1]

It is the saying of a man who is not easy to understand, but who is worth the trouble which the attempt involves. To put his attitude in a word, he regarded Silesia as strategically the most valuable of the French provinces. He would have preferred almost to sacrifice Lorraine.

The Council, in arriving at the above resolution, had reckoned without the minister who was to carry it into effect. At this juncture d'Argenson found that the very circumstances which had paralysed his efforts in the beginning of the year were telling powerfully in his favour; for the anarchy prevailing in the French Government was such that the only means of positive action open to any of the ministers was in the frustration of his colleagues' designs. To that task d'Argenson addressed himself with right good will. In transmitting his instructions to Vaulgrenant, the French envoy at Dresden, he allowed him to understand that if he could only succeed in failing, his failure would not go unforgiven.[2] The Austrian majority in the Council were by no means unanimous; and their different resolutions were communicated to Vaulgrenant without the faintest attempt to reconcile them.[3] "I agree that the matter is one of some difficulty," wrote d'Argenson; "M. de Vaulgrenant will get out of it as best he can." [4] Above

[1] 352. [2] 353. [3] 354. [4] 355.

all, he made the ambassador clearly understand that he was to listen to no proposal which would tend to deprive Frederick of Silesia, well knowing that with that object only had the Empress been induced to treat at all.[1] In fact, Vaulgrenant could not possibly mistake the tone which the minister desired him to assume.

In this enterprise d'Argenson found a powerful ally in the man whom, in the beginning of the year, he had endeavoured vainly to assist. Frederick had achieved one of his master-strokes. Upon hearing of the Convention of Hanover, Maria Theresa had formed a daring design. She resolved to ignore the approach of winter, and to concentrate her troops in Saxon territory for a direct descent upon Brandenburg. The plan was concerted secretly with Augustus, and the Saxon army would act with the Austrians.[2] At the close of the regular campaign Frederick had returned to Berlin. His sword had clicked again in the scabbard, his hand had fallen nerveless from the hilt, when suddenly a stray word let fall at a dinner-table by Count Brühl was conveyed carefully to Berlin; tensely the fingers closed upon the hilt, the sword leapt forth again bare and terrible, and at the end of a three-weeks' campaign, which we cannot even read of now without dancing eyes and tingling blood, the lion of Brandenburg entered Dresden.

It was through streets strewn with the red work that the Austrian envoy, on the verge of desperation, made his way to the house of Vaulgrenant,[3]

[1] 356. [2] 357. [3] 358.

whom he found but moderately willing to listen to proposals in doubtful favour with the ministry at home, and to the prejudice of the man who might sleep that night in the capital of his fallen enemy. The conference was without result; it was never resumed.[1] Through the combined efforts of d'Argenson and Frederick the whole negotiation had come to nothing; and Maria Theresa had no alternative but to sign with Frederick the Treaty of Dresden. By this treaty the Convention of Hanover was confirmed. Frederick was free to withdraw from the war, and he was again recognised as sovereign of Silesia.

This was the last great blow which French policy sustained during the year 1745. Frederick had broken finally with France. Months before, when the position had first been suggested by the news of the Treaty of Hanover, d'Argenson had conceived his policy in regard to it. He knew better than any man the real causes of Frederick's defection; and deplore it as he might, he saw no reason for enlisting Prussia among the enemies of France. He had expressed his thought in a letter to Belleisle:—[2]

"We must leave him alone; he will remain neutral; he will deceive the Queen of Hungary as he deceives everybody else; he will continue to cause her uneasiness until the general peace, and it is his interest to do so; he will oblige her always to keep an army in the neighbourhood of Silesia. . . . We can retain his alliance by interest, or at

[1] 359. [2] 360.

least by a certain understanding which prevents him hurting us, and which will be useful to us in many ways." "In fact, as he told the Prussian ambassador as soon as the Treaty of Dresden was known, he regarded Prussia as henceforth the political centre of French interests in the Empire and in the north." [1]

So concludes this study of the position really occupied by d'Argenson with regard to the political events of 1745. It is not without reason that it has been dwelt upon at length; for the period embraced seems immeasurably the more important of d'Argenson's ministry. The principal events of the following year are really no more than episodes, loose, and comparatively of little weight. In 1745 however, we have a long and connected series of incidents, affording an extended view of the rival policies; and furthermore, we are brought directly into contact with the great political question of the day, the question suggested by the growing change in the relations of the German powers.

Moreover, it is upon his action during this period that the severity of criticism in regard to d'Argenson's ministry is mainly based. To accept that criticism as conclusive, it would have been necessary to obliterate every impression suggested by his life before and after. There was no alternative but to examine it; and if we have sometimes been compelled to challenge the positions of MM. de Broglie and Zevort, it is with a diffidence due to authorities so distinguished. Yet no diffidence need

[1] 361.

disguise the result. So far as d'Argenson personally is concerned, each historian supplies the material for questioning the conclusions of the other : and at the same time for conceiving a third, in harmony with d'Argenson's known character and opinions. So far as we can see, neither writer has examined these events with reference to any general scheme of policy in d'Argenson's own mind; the forms that happened to be impressed upon that policy by the accidents or circumstances of the moment appear to have been mistaken for the policy itself—a process which, for a man in d'Argenson's position, would efface the distinction between statesmanship and imbecility. Moreover, he has frequently been held responsible for events over which he had no control whatever ; and in M. de Broglie's case, failure to appreciate or sympathise with him is aggravated by personal opposition to his measures; and about the whole account of his ministry, equable as it is, there are unwelcome suggestions of Marshal de Noailles.

It is unpleasant to seem to speak so lightly of those to whom one owes so much; and it is no further necessary. The conclusion remains that during this period d'Argenson had a clear and statesmanlike policy ; that thwarted and crossed at every turn, he did what little he could to realise it ; that he was forced by the defection of his own government into a false and even ridiculous position ; and that, in the circumstances, he acquitted himself as worthily as any man could be expected to do.

In the following year, 1746,[1] the course of French foreign politics is fortunately plain and simple. D'Argenson's position is clearly marked, and it has been treated with what appears to be substantial justice.[2]

The year presents three striking episodes. It opens with a strange attempt and a still stranger failure, it is distinguished by at least one marked success, and it closes with a curious comedy of intrigue of which the *dénouement* was d'Argenson's disgrace.

It was not the chance or the exigency of the moment that led to the famous Negotiation of Turin. We can scarcely say how long d'Argenson had dreamed of the liberation of Italy;[3] but for years past he had clung to the idea with something of the fervour of a religious faith. It was the one indulgence in the luxuries of idealism of which he refused to deprive himself. The hope was an inspiring one, and not a year had elapsed since his accession to the ministry, when he began his famous attempt to realise it.

The key to the position was held by the King of Sardinia. Sardinia, in alliance with Austria and in the pay of England, was the great barrier against the Bourbon advance in Italy. To seduce Charles Emmanuel from the cause of Maria Theresa would have been to cripple the Austrian power in Italy; to induce him to turn his arms against his late ally would have ensured her expulsion from the peninsula. There was only one danger to be

[1] 362. [2] 363. [3] 364.

feared. In Spain, with the Italian branches of the Spanish Bourbons, the House of Savoy had a deadly enemy; and d'Argenson had predicted years before[1] that the whole project might be ruined by the resistance of the Court of Madrid. He was only reassured by the reflection that in her foreign relations, Spain was ultimately dependent upon France, and that a French minister of firmness and courage would be able to bend her to his will.

In September, 1745, d'Argenson approached the Sardinian Government with certain remarkable proposals. He suggested a territorial re-arrangement of Northern Italy, the expulsion of the Austrians from the peninsula by the combined forces of France, Spain, and Sardinia, and the constitution of the various states as an Italian confederation. These overtures were coldly received, the Piedmontese minister representing that their practical effect would be to draw down upon Sardinia the vengeance of Austria and of the whole Empire. The defeat of Bassignano, the progress of the Bourbon arms, and the danger which menaced the city of Alessandria, modified the dispositions of Turin. The negotiations were resumed; and proceeded so far that on the 26th of December the partition of territory designed by d'Argenson was accepted by the Sardinian Government, though the idea of an Italian Confederation was still repulsed. On the return of Champeaux,[2] the French agent, from Turin, arrangements were rapidly made for the conclusion of the treaty; and

[1] 365. [2] 366.

on the 20th of January, Champeaux again set out from Paris as minister plenipotentiary, charged to obtain a final settlement within two days. Coincidently the Spanish Government was apprised of the negotiation, and its adhesion was required within the same time. Meanwhile, at the instance of Montgardin, the Sardinian envoy, d'Argenson wrote to Marshal de Maillebois, in command of the French army in Italy, acquainting him with the situation, and warning him to remain upon the defensive until the conclusion of the treaty.

While the preliminaries were being signed at Turin, the reverses of Prince Charles Edward freed the English Government from a pressing embarrassment; and on the very day (December 26th), the conclusion of the Treaty of Dresden enabled Maria Theresa to detach thirty thousand men for the army of Italy. The Sardinian ministers began to repent of the haste with which they had listened to the French overtures; they saw that they had embarked upon a desperate venture, in which it would be folly to persist; and henceforth their only care was to obtain an armistice which might enable them to relieve Alessandria and to improve their military position. Finding that in the proposals upon which Champeaux was demanding a final answer, the preliminaries of the 26th of December had been extended, they refused to accept the extension, and they demanded that in case the Spanish Government failed to accede to the treaty, the menace with which Louis XV. had tried to influence it should be made a definite

stipulation, and the French troops withdrawn from Italy at the end of two months.

The news of the proposed treaty was received at Madrid with passionate outcries. So far from consenting within forty-eight hours, Philip V. addressed to his nephew an indignant letter of remonstrance; and a special ambassador was despatched to Paris with orders to check the progress of the negotiation. At first the treaty had been kept an absolute secret between d'Argenson and the King; but it was now a subject of popular rumour, and it became necessary to communicate it to the Council.

A storm of opposition was at once let loose, and feeling the King's resolution wavering, d'Argenson resolved upon a decisive step. On the 17th of February, relying upon the good faith of the Court of Turin, he signed the armistice between France and Sardinia.

Meanwhile the Sardinian plans were complete. The great Austrian reinforcement was approaching Mantua; the Piedmontese army was ready to march, while Maillebois, trusting to his instructions, remained inactive, and without a suspicion of the event which was preparing. He was soon undeceived. His son, who was in charge of the armistice, received a letter warning him not to approach Turin unless he was prepared to make the concessions demanded by the King of Sardinia, to raise the siege of Alessandria, and to declare the armistice immediately. This Maillebois was unable to do; he was supplied with passports, and informed that on the following morning (March 5th) the

Piedmontese army would be put in motion. A few days afterwards eleven French battalions were surprised at Asti, and their surrender opened to the Sardinian troops the road to Alessandria.

Exactly two days before, the prolonged resistance of the Spanish Court yielded to the determination of d'Argenson; and Philip V. and Elisabeth Farnese accepted the Treaty of Turin. They were soon to hear that the plan they had striven so obstinately to frustrate had been destroyed by the perfidy of Sardinia itself.

The news of the fall of Asti created consternation at Paris; and a host of d'Argenson's enemies, headed by Noailles and Maurepas, were only too eager to fasten the blame upon the Foreign Minister. The King was carried away by the tide of reaction; and after the fashion of weak men, he rushed to the opposite extreme. Everything was done to propitiate Spain. Noailles was charged with a special mission to the Spanish Court, where he used his opportunities to decry the Minister; and most fatal step of all, the commander in Italy, Maillebois, was instructed, for the rest of the campaign, to yield the initiative to the Spanish generals. The two armies were divided by jealousies and suspicions; the Austro-Sardinians pushed their advantage; and by the end of the year the French were driven to the borders of Provence and the Austrians entered Genoa.

Such was the famous fiasco of Turin. The project was doomed from the beginning. The whole history of diplomacy could afford no more intricate

play of cross-purposes. Not one of the parties to the negotiation understood the position of the rest; and it was only by a masterly comprehension of its own that the Sardinian Government escaped with success. Upon the conditions of the attempt and the causes of its failure it is unnecessary further to enlarge. For the present purposes it is principally important as perhaps the one event in the whole course of d'Argenson's ministry for which his responsibility is clear and decided; and it is the one event which plainly reveals his greatness and weakness as a practical statesman, and displays the very qualities and defects a previous knowledge of him might have led us to expect. That matter may be dealt with more conveniently when our impressions of his ministry have to be reviewed.

It was one of d'Argenson's political convictions that French influence in Germany was to be best established by refraining from provocation of the German powers. Throughout the winter of 1745 he was engaged in a series of tedious negotiations with the various Electoral Courts, designed to secure the neutrality of the Empire. His plans were successful; and he was able, with the co-operation of Frederick and of Maurice de Saxe, to banish the war entirely from Germany, and to confine it to Italy and Flanders. The conduct of these measures has secured the commendation of his most critical historian.

There remains to be considered a curious series of events, which serves to illustrate the peculiar

relations subsisting in the French Government, and the embarrassments by which statesmanship was beset.

In July, 1746, Philip V. of Spain died; and the event was followed immediately afterwards by the death of his daughter, the Dauphine of France. The new king, Ferdinand, was strongly desirous that the young French prince should espouse the sister of the late Dauphine; and the proposal was supported by a powerful party at the French Court, at the head of which were Noailles and Maurepas. The project was distasteful to Louis XV., and it was rejected, ostensibly upon religious grounds. It is suggested that d'Argenson's qualms were occasioned, not by an access of unwonted scrupulosity, but by the hope of repairing the disaster of Turin by the betrothal of the Dauphin to a daughter of the King of Sardinia.[1] Louis was favourable to the scheme, and negotiations were actively begun; but the determination of Sardinia to press her advantage in Italy led to their suspension.

It was then resolved to demand in marriage the daughter of Augustus III. of Saxony. The enterprise proceeded with singular rapidity, and d'Argenson is proud to record it as the most striking of his diplomatic successes. Yet on the very day on which the marriage was celebrated at Dresden, the apparent author of it was disgraced.

The reason is as remarkable as the fact itself. Throughout the negotiation there were two policies at work, one of which was entirely unknown to the

[1] 367.

French minister. D'Argenson had conceived certain bold and statesmanlike views with regard to the position of Saxony. He hoped to bring about an understanding between Saxony and Prussia, and by the combined influence of France and Prussia, to make the crown of Poland hereditary in the Saxon house. By so doing it might be possible to withdraw Augustus III. from his blind dependence upon Vienna and St. Petersburg. The first step in the realisation of this plan must be the ruin of the Saxon minister, Count Brühl, a sworn partisan of Austria. The other policy was that of Count Brühl himself. He proposed to take advantage of the French overtures in order to bring about an understanding between France and Austria, and so to use their combined forces for the destruction of the rising power of Prussia. The first step in furtherance of the scheme must be the ruin of the Marquis d'Argenson, a firm ally of Prussia.

In fact, the negotiation of Dresden resolved itself into a personal duel between Count Brühl and d'Argenson. It ended, as we know, in the triumph of the former, through the intervention of his great compatriot, Maurice de Saxe.[1] The victor of Raucoux had recognised a strong personal interest in the proposal to make his niece Dauphine of France; and unknown to d'Argenson, he had exerted his powerful influence in favour of it both at Versailles and Dresden. Having nothing further to gain from the war, he was easily persuaded to second Brühl's scheme for the mediation of Saxony; and

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being given to understand by the Saxon minister that the real obstacle in the way of an arrangement was the "faux système"[1] pursued by the d'Argensons, he resolved to do his best to compass their fall. On the 10th of December he wrote to Brühl:

"People here are beginning to suspect that the d'Argensons have no sincere desire for peace. There is a shell planted; and if we apply the fuse, they will be blown into the air. . . . I have sounded the Marquis with regard to that question you spoke of last. He is unwilling to listen to any proposals on behalf of the Court of Vienna, and talks upon that matter in a very strange fashion."[2]

Maurice proceeded to apply the fuse. He won over Madame de Pompadour, between whom and the Foreign Minister there was no love lost;[3] and he engaged his friend and d'Argenson's enemy, Noailles, to use his influence with the King. Accordingly on the 15th of December Noailles submitted to Louis XV. a famous memoir,[4] in which d'Argenson's ministry is elaborately represented as one long disaster: his portrait being drawn with a bitterness of party spirit and personal animosity but thinly disguised by an affectation of disinterestedness. D'Argenson was by no means unaware of the intrigues against him; but he would not stoop to defend himself. He thought that his position had been strengthened by the successful negotiation of the Saxon marriage, of

[1] 369. [2] 370. [3] 371. [4] 372.

which he imagined he had the sole honour; and he believed himself secure in the confidence of the King. The latter, who seems to have regarded d'Argenson with unusual esteem, succumbed to the importunities of the Favourite, the Courts of Saxony and Spain, the all-powerful Maurice de Saxe, the Council of ministers, and every one whom d'Argenson, to relieve his soul or to protect the public, had found it necessary to offend; and on the very day on which what seemed to be a brilliant diplomatic stroke was consummated at Dresden, the man who imagined himself the author of it was dismissed.

The immediate cause of his fall was his obstinate refusal to traffic with Austria, or to sacrifice what generations of experience had taught him to regard as the interest of France to the fortuitous prepossessions of a foreign adventurer.[1]

We can form no just estimate of d'Argenson's capacity as a statesman without some clear ideas of his position as a minister. He had entered office burdened with two disabilities, the cause of which it has been the most important of duties to lay bare. He had no aptitude for court intrigue; he had no power of confronting opposition and sternly frowning it down. Unable to win, he neglected the courtiers; unable to coerce his enemies in the Ministry, he was only too happy to avoid them. He was forced to rely upon the value of his services, and upon the esteem and confidence of the King. That he managed to secure that confidence, and to preserve it even at the moment of

[1] 373.

his fall, there is ample evidence to show. Relying upon the royal support, he did not hesitate to enforce those principles of policy which research and reflection had led him to embrace. He determined, so far as possible, to make his will felt; and the incapacity with which he was charged by Noailles and the anti-Prussian party in the Council was really incapacity to accept proposals at variance with every statesmanlike tradition. Without regard for the consequences to himself, he acted for what he thought to be the public interest—a process which no French statesman could then pursue without offending innumerable susceptibilities, and uniting every one, from the reigning favourite to the most insignificant chargé d'affaires, in a league of enmity against him. They all combined to convict him of incapacity and indiscretion; he passed among the courtiers as "Dunce d'Argenson";[1] and his eccentricities of manner gave occasion to caricatures which were carefully gathered up by that consummate chronicler of the unimportant, the Duc de Luynes. The persecution was too bitter to be inspired merely by contempt; and we have only to read the letters of Noailles and Saxe to know that they were directed, not to the dismissal of an incapable minister, but to the removal of a statesman who barred their path.[2]

In his public life, d'Argenson is distinguished rather for what he might have done than for anything he did. In 1745 he was, as it has been necessary to show, in no sense responsible for the

[1] 374. [2] 375.

policy of France; while throughout the year 1746 his position was being undermined in all directions. There was, however, at least one transaction for which his responsibility is clear and undivided. His conduct of the Negotiation of Turin displays in brief the character of the man, and the peculiar qualities of his statesmanship. It reveals one capital defect, the defect of one who has been long accustomed to look upon the world through his own eyes. He made a fatal mistake in attributing his own motives to the Sardinian Government, and in imagining that it would consent for a national ideal to hazard its present and material interests. He did not see that in offering the King of Sardinia the hegemony of the Italian states, he was inviting him to accept the desperate part which had been played by Frederick in Silesia; and that, though the reward would indeed be brilliant, it was far too distant and uncertain to be readily sought by the Government of Turin. The defect, grave as it was, proceeded chiefly from lack of the experience, which a man like d'Argenson can only gain through the terrible bitterness of a first disappointment. We have only to consider the incident further to see that no man ever compassed disaster with so many of the qualities which make for success. The scheme was distinguished by grandeur of conception, and in pursuing it the author gave proof of decision and intrepidity. Incidentally he achieved one triumph of which any statesman might be proud. His dealings with Spain were a monument of reasoned daring and

determination; and the acceptance of the Treaty of Turin by Elisabeth Farnese is the most striking tribute that could have been paid to d'Argenson's political capacity. It is true that he was carried away by an enthusiasm which a longer experience would certainly have chastened; and that he courted disaster by endeavouring to accomplish in three weeks the work of thirty, or a hundred and thirty, years. Yet his callow temerity was not ignoble; and French diplomacy can boast of few more honourable failures.

France owes to d'Argenson one lasting debt. He strove, as gallantly as ever man could, to arrest the disintegration of French policy. His determination to adhere to the anti-Austrian tradition embroiled him with his colleagues in the Ministry, and became the occasion of his fall; while it has been made the principal ground of impeachment by certain writers of his own country. He is charged with having sacrificed the substantial interests of France to his blind prejudice in favour of Prussia; and with having refused to recognise the new problems created by the decline of the Austrian House. Such criticism must not pass unchallenged.

It cannot be too clearly remembered that to French statesmen in 1745 the decline of Austria had not yet begun.[1] Fondly had they dreamed of the ruin of her dominion; they woke up to find that in the person of Maria Theresa the Hapsburg dynasty had renewed its youth. The Austrian suc-

[1] 376.

cession had been maintained in arms; and it would never even have been questioned had it not been for Frederick's seizure of Silesia. As to Frederick himself we have to beware of misconceptions; for in much of French criticism with regard to him we recognise the impressions of 1763—or even of 1870. No one suspected what was in the man, and it was not until December, 1745, that people began to think of him as "the Great." Only three months before the campaign in Saxony, which won from his people and wrung from his enemies that noble salutation, he was described by the oldest of his admirers, d'Argenson himself, as "a man who *might have been great.*"[1] It was not until after the Treaty of Dresden that he ceased to be looked upon as merely an able and unscrupulous prince who had wantonly provoked the resentment of his neighbours, and who had only to be abandoned by his one ally to receive the punishment his insolence had deserved. When, in the previous September, the Empress, at the cost of some of her Flemish provinces, offered to purchase the withdrawal of France, neither she nor d'Argenson mistook for a moment the real meaning of the proposal. In all human probability Frederick would have been doomed. Those who suggest that the "traitor of Hanover" should have been abandoned to his fate, forget the sublime capacity for vengeance with which men like Frederick are endowed. If such a man had yielded to the Empress the sword of Prussia, it would have been to receive it back as

[1] 377.

the sword of the Empire. The Imperial troops, headed by the Prussians and commanded by the victor of Friedbourg, would have marched to wrest from the common enemy his ill-gotten provinces of Flanders and Lorraine; France might have taken the place of Saxony, and the pride of Paris been bitterly rebuked a hundred years before the time. D'Argenson may not have seen all this; but he was a statesman and a thinker, and he was wise enough to know that such cheap successes as the Empress offered him are often the very dearest of all. With an admirable moral courage, he maintained that nothing Frederick could do, no treason he might contrive, could lessen the interest of France in maintaining him in Silesia; and he would not allow the resentments of a month to obscure the tradition or the teaching of a century.

In maintaining his policy, d'Argenson had to struggle against the irresistible current which was carrying the Monarchy to destruction. Since the death of Louis XIV., private convenience had been the only criterion of national interest. Dubois and Fleury, for their own purposes, had dismantled the tradition of French foreign policy; and though an effort had been made to re-establish it by Chauvelin and his pupil d'Argenson, their work could not long stand against the forces of disintegration. After d'Argenson's withdrawal no further attempt was made, and he lived to see the complete surrender of those cherished principles he had striven so bravely to maintain. D'Argenson admired and reverenced Richelieu; and he has been laughed at

for aspiring to be his worthy successor.[1] Banished from power until the age of fifty, he could never attain the eminence of his master. He could only defend for the last time the policy which that master had bequeathed to France.

His defence was in vain. The collapse abroad heralded the collapse at home. It was only in 1789 that the French Monarchy surrendered its charter to the French People. It had resigned it, thirty-three years before, into the hands of Maria Theresa.

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V.

1747–1757.

A momentous decade—The Journal—Private life.

It was on the 10th of January, 1747, that d'Argenson's ministry came to an end. For a year or so he found it a little hard to support his banishment from power; but it is plain that after that time his personal ambitions were gradually forgotten amid the press and play of wider interests. It is true that he never quite dismisses his hopes of office, and that he even fondles the pretty, courtier-like phrase with which he will accept an invitation to return; but there is none of the ardent, even feverish anticipation which clouds the period before his ministry; and we feel that when he speaks of his own prospects it is with the smiling, tranquil air of a man who is fond of pleasant dreams. He was far from being unhappy. The ten years that preceded his death were a period when a man of d'Argenson's character will desire rather to watch than to work.

Though his outward life meanwhile was devoid

of incident, it was inwardly full of stir and excitement. Throughout these years society in France was passing through the most critical of all its phases. Men's veins were tingling with that new wine with which the old bottles were already bursting; while across the history of the time is writ the word of omen—Revolution. It is this that lends to d'Argenson's pages such a vivid power and fascination.

The chief interest of his retirement was the composition of that Journal which is, and which he evidently designed to be, the most important commentary on a momentous period. He spared no pains to obtain direct and definite information, securing correspondents at the Court, in the Parlement, in the army, and in every department of the public service; while in handling events he added to the industry of the chronicler the grasp and acumen of a political expert. It is from these pages that we catch the impression of d'Argenson's power. We feel that a man cannot act in one year like a blind, blundering doctrinaire, and write like a statesman in the next. It may be useful to glance very lightly at the history of the time as it appeared to one of its most sagacious observers. In doing so we are in the hands of a cicerone who is not satisfied to speak by rote.

In December, 1747, after speaking sorrowfully of the national prospects, d'Argenson writes:—

"Will any one have the hardihood to propose an advance towards republican government. So far as I see, the people are utterly unfitted for it; the

nobility, the great lords, the tribunals, accustomed as they are to servitude, have never turned their thoughts in that direction, and they have no inclination of the kind. Still these ideas are coming, and a habit is readily formed among the French." [1]

Two years after these words were written a profound change had taken place. The terms of the peace of Aix-la-Chapelle had created grave discontent; and it was fanned to the heat of fury by the news that the idol of the Parisian populace, the English Prince Charles Edward, was to be expelled from France. His violent arrest at the doors of the Opera aroused bitter indignation, which d'Argenson shared.

"This 'garrotting' will be an eternal disgrace for France. We shall be put, no doubt, by the side of Cromwell, who beheaded his king. For no purpose whatever we have garrotted the lawful heir to this Crown. Nay more, he had been useful to us, and we were indebted to him for an effective diversion which placed Brussels in our hands. It will be long before people have done talking of this" (December, 1748).[2]

People did more than talk. The event gave rise to some of the most venomous tirades that indignation ever wrung from helplessness; and curiously enough, it was the starting point of that alert and violent opposition which vexed the country for forty years. The excitement occasioned by it had not subsided when a renewal of the great struggles

[1] 379. [2] 380.

between the Crown, the Clergy, and the Parlement, gave a new motive to popular passion. The clergy refused to administer extreme unction to those who had not accepted the Bull Unigenitus; they were opposed by the resolution of the Parlement of Paris; the Crown interfered on behalf of the clergy; and Church and Crown united their forces in an endeavour to coerce the Parlement. At the same time the attempt of the Controller-General Machault to force the vingtième upon clergy and people alike united the Church and the Parlement in opposition to the Crown. The Crown, incapable of pursuing a policy of its own, allowed itself to be buffetted between the two parties; it was regarded with alternate scorn and fury; and popular feeling rallied in support of the outraged Parlement of Paris. The Church too was feared, hated, and afterwards despised;[1] and every day added to the influence and prestige of the rising party of Enlightenment.[2]

D'Argenson's attitude throughout the controversy may be summed in a single word. He was with the Parlement against the Church, and with both against the Crown. It is often an occasion of wonder that Machault's proposal to bring the clergy under the ordinary fiscal arrangements of the realm should have met with such violent opposition. In a single sentence d'Argenson reveals the reason:—

"These pamphlets" (for proving "that the King has the whole right and jurisdiction over the pro-

[1] 381. [2] 382.

perty of the clergy") "have been unfavourably received, their cause, their object, being nothing but money, the need of money, the Treasury already so full of money, the Ministry appearing to think so little of relieving the burden of the people, the Court spending right and left; and not a wise reformation of the clergy. That is the thing to excite the people against the soundest principles."[1]

Such a passage alone is sufficient to show the deep distrust into which the Government had fallen. The organ of that distrust was the Parlement of Paris. D'Argenson at first had trembled for its existence; he soon saw that the forces behind it were irresistible.

"In the general commotion," he writes, "the Parlement of Paris has nothing more to fear. The entire nation is rising in opposition to ungoverned and arbitrary will, and they have the Parlements at their head" (April, 1752).[2]

So acute an observer could not fail to see that the most alarming features of the struggle were the indirect results which it might produce. It had scarcely begun when he devoted to it one of the boldest and most penetrating of all his reflections.

"I am afraid that all this, if pushed too far, may produce some great outbreak. Men may arise who, under colour of the clerical cause, will sustain the cause of the nation. With little merit or ability of their own, these men will obtain influence, they will secure the affection of the people. Let

[1] 383. [2] 384.

no one say that such men exist no longer. The statue is in the block of marble; the meanest of men will rise to the occasion. Even to-day mark how many writers there are of learning and enlightenment. For some years the wind has been blowing from England upon these materials; the materials may catch fire. Look at the tone of the remonstrances against the vingtième prepared by the Parlements and the Estates. These Attorneys-General of Parlement, these syndics of Estates, such might be these great men I speak of; the whole nation might catch fire, the Nobility throwing in its lot with the Clergy, and afterwards the Third Estate. If the result were that it became necessary to summon the States-General of the Realm, they would find occasion to regulate the finances and the demands of money for the future. Those Estates would not assemble in vain. Let the men in power have a care; they would be very much in earnest" (December, 1750).[1]

D'Argenson's apprehensions were soon confirmed. A year later he writes:

"To-day the popular mind is occupied with this approaching revolution in the government; people talk of nothing else, and every one is full of it, even the bourgeois" (November, 1751).[2]

Among high and low the feeling was the same.

"The evil consequences of our absolute monarchy are finally persuading every one, both in France and throughout Europe, that it is the worst of all forms of government. Among men of enlighten-

[1] 385. [2] 386.

ment (*philosophes*) I hear nothing but the confident assertion that even anarchy is to be preferred to it; for it leaves to each inhabitant at least the enjoyment of his property, and whatever disorders or acts of violence may occur are to the prejudice of private people only, and not, as now, to the body of the state" (September, 1752).[1]

These eight years of clamour and coercion, violence and weakness, produced a very profound impression upon French society, and upon d'Argenson himself.

"The opinion of the nation is gaining ground, and may lead us far. It is remarked that never until to-day have the names of 'Nation' and 'State' been so frequently in use. Under Louis XIV. these two names were never pronounced, and people had no idea even of their meaning. Never has knowledge of the rights of the nation and of liberty been so widely diffused as it is to-day. Even I, who have always made these matters the subject of thought and study, had a very different mind and feeling with regard to them. The change is due to the Parlement and the English" (June, 1754).[2]

This last word suggests one final reflection, which is prompted by a hundred passages of d'Argenson's Journal, and which, to us at least, is of singular interest. Ten or twenty years before, Frenchmen had been proud of their own government, and had laughed at that of England as a masterpiece of absurdity. After 1750 a change

[1] 387. [2] 388.

took place. It was not that they had begun to admire the English constitution or the balance of powers commended by Montesquieu; of that they knew little and comprehended less. What they were impressed with was none other than that very spirit of noise and turbulence and apparent disorder which they had before regarded with contemptuous wonder. As they watched their country outstripped in the race, they came to feel that there was some virtue in a rude independence: and that the government of England, anomalous as it appeared, was consistent with national honour and prosperity. If it be allowed, in deference to French protest, that the influence of English philosophy upon the Revolution was slight and circuitous, it is no less true that the influence of the English people and polity was rapid, powerful and direct. In fanning the glow of revolutionary feeling during these seven or eight years at least, the comparative excellence of the English government was only less operative than the worthlessness of the French. It is a fact of which we hear very little, but with which d'Argenson at any rate was deeply impressed.

Interlocked with the political battle, there proceeded a spiritual conflict of far more broad renown. Again light had become darkness; and out of the darkness came the world-old cry, "Let there be Light!" Again with d'Argenson's bright intelligence may we watch the movement of emancipation.

He gives us momentary glimpses of men then

painfully struggling into fame, and now as illustrious as their enemies are obscure. Here is the great Encyclopædist, as he first appeared to d'Argenson:

"The man Diderot, author of the obscene book 'Bijoux Indiscrets' and of the 'Aveugle clairvoyant,' has been examined in prison at Vincennes. He received the magistrate with the pride of a fanatic. He was told by the person who examined him that he was an insolent scoundrel, and would remain there for a long time. This Diderot, when arrested, had just finished the composition of a surprising book against religion, entitled 'Le Tombeau des Préjugés'" (August, 1749).[1]

"Buffon, the author of the 'Natural History,' is beside himself with apprehension at the success of his book. The devout party are furious, and mean to have it burnt by the hand of the hangman. It is quite true that it contradicts Genesis completely" (December, 1749).[2]

"Voltaire writes here that he is much pleased with his residence in Prussia. He says he means to show how cleverly he can live with all the world, since he is on the best of terms with the father of the faithful—(the Pope, whose letter he has had printed at the head of his tragedy of 'Mahomet')—and with the father of heretics, the King of Prussia" (April, 1751).[3]

"Jean Jacques Rousseau of Geneva, a pleasing writer and a would-be philosopher, says that men of letters should take these three vows, of poverty,

[1] 389. [2] 390. [3] 391.

freedom, and truth. That has prejudiced the government against him; he expressed these sentiments in certain prefaces; in consequence he was spoken of in the private apartments, and the King observed that it would be a good plan to have him locked up in Bicêtre. His Serene Highness the Count de Clermont added that it would not be a bad thing to let them give him a sound thrashing as well. People are afraid of these free philosophers. My friend d'Alembert is one of them, and he is threatened with the reprehension of our state Inquisitors. The Jesuits are the prime movers in this system of inquisition" (April, 1753).[1]

In the very centre of light and learning, this Jesuit influence was at work. Here is a little picture of an election to the Académie Française:

"Buffon, whose 'Natural History' is at present under examination by the Sorbonne, and d'Alembert, of the Encyclopædia, are withdrawing in fear of being suddenly branded; there will remain none but fools to elect. I am acquainted too with Bougainville, who hoped for a place but is suspected of Jansenism: and with the Abbé de Condillac, the metaphysician, who, however, has spoken too freely of the soul. . . . It seems that everything is being done to establish the Inquisition in France; and the more our priests are hated, the more hateful they manage to make themselves" (June, 1753).[2]

To-day, penetrated with the power and impalpability of the spirit, we have lost faith in the arm

[1] 392. [2] 393.

of flesh. To d'Argenson however, it seemed as though the Unholy Office establishing in France would flourish as fatally as its Spanish prototype.

"'Lettres de cachet' have been issued against the Abbés de Prades and Yvon; the rumour runs that they are also out against Diderot, the principal author of the Encyclopædia. Woe to the enemies of the Jesuits! The French Inquisition is increasing in extent and power; it is now to be reinforced by the bigotry of the Court. . . . Woe to the honest men who go about their business and are sound of heart and mind, but who are not sufficiently careful to control their tongues when speaking of light and liberty!" (February, 1752).[1]

Among the "honnêtes gens tranquilles, qui ne maîtrisent pas leur langue," none had more reason to tremble than d'Argenson. For some time a remarkable political work of his[2] had been circulating quietly among the Philosophic party; and his religious opinions were at least as licentious as any to be found even among the clergy.[3] By political profession he was an adherent of the Gallican Church; by private conviction he was a deist after the manner of Voltaire, but with none of Voltaire's apostolic bitterness. Deist or Gallican, he was a confirmed enemy of obscurantism in all its forms.[4] His habitual attitude towards it is prettily illustrated in the following passage:

"At last we shall see a ridiculous censure of the Sorbonne upon the 'Esprit des Lois' of President de Montesquieu, for they hold it to contain many

[1] 394. [2] 395. [3] 396. [4] 397.

things contrary to revealed religion. This condemnation will be a positive scandal, for the 'Esprit' is a philosophical book universally admired, and honourable to our age and nation. This Sorbonne, which is now no more than a carcass, will remind one of Fat John remonstrating with the priest of the parish; and revealed religion will suffer through its interference, instead of gaining by it" (March, 1753).[1]

The great movement was in its infancy when d'Argenson died; but he lived long enough to see that there was much in the old society besides the Sorbonne[2] which was "now no more than a carcass." He tells us how Madame de Pompadour invited Diderot and d'Alembert to resume the work upon the Encyclopædia which their Jesuit enemies had been unable to continue: and his reflections from time to time enable us to measure the growing influence of the Philosophic leaders. In May, 1754, was written this eloquent tribute to their advancing power.

"It is averred that everything is preparing in France for a great reform in religion. It will be a very different thing from that rude Reformation, a medley of freedom and superstition, which came to us from Germany in the sixteenth century. Both have been brought about by the intolerable tyranny and avarice of the priests; but as our age and nation are far more enlightened than that of Luther, we shall not stop half way. Priest, priestcraft, revelation, mystery, all will be banished;

[1] 398. [2] 399.

and we shall be content to see God through the greatness and goodness of His works. It is in our own hearts that He has written His law, His love, our gratitude, our hopes in Providence, and our fear of its justice. As to the attributes of God, we are as wise as the priests; we can adore Him by ourselves, and without the help of these persons pious by profession, who call themselves the ministers of the altar and who are only the drones of the hive" (May, 1754).[1]

And before blotting his page, he enables us to comprehend in a single glance the parallel movements of the time.

"Soon with this reformation in religion will come the reformation in government. Political tyranny is interlinked with ecclesiastical tyranny. Against them are turned the two branches of the forward movement,[2] the one in the direction of moderate democracy, the other towards adoring God in mind and heart alone. We give up the attempt to do anything more with these two forms of government, and in politics and society we see matters as they ought to be. . . . Nature tells us all that we need; we listen and follow her when the imposture of tyranny exists no longer."[3]

We have only to compare Citizen d'Argenson with the former Absolutist of 1732 to realise the rate at which France was travelling.

If the revolution, political and moral, was the chief, it was not the only interest of d'Argenson's Journal. His pages reflect the many-featured life

[1] 400. [2] 401. [3] 402.

of a great and old society.[1] We can only advert to his luminous criticism of economics and finance:[2] his strange apologies for the debauchery of the King: and the heart-sick comparisons which he sometimes makes between the condition and government of France and England. He beheld, with apprehension and despair, the avowed resolution of the English nation to destroy the colonial influence of France; he beheld, with astonishment and alarm, the abandonment of the traditional French foreign policy by the Treaty of Versailles in 1756. He was oppressed more than all by the critical state of the interior. His descriptions of the French provinces are the most striking examples of d'Argenson's power. They display, not merely a mastery of facts, but a masterful hold upon their meaning; and they are informed by the pure and unaffected habit of humanity which he had learnt in an older than the Philosophic school. Again, "C'est par le cœur que son esprit est grand!"

Unkindly were it to lay down the Journal without a grateful reference to d'Argenson's style. It is a vexed question, though all that is necessary has long been said with the noble generosity of Ste. Beuve. Those of d'Argenson's friends who were gifted with a pretty wit used to tell him that he wanted style. What they meant was that he wanted stylishness. In those days, before Buffon had let in light upon the darkness, the meaning of style was very undefined. People used the word to

[1] 403. [2] 404.

denote delicacy and refinement. To those qualities d'Argenson could never pretend. His diction was of a heterogeneous character, the language of polite society mingling with expressions from the gutter or the farmyard, or places more unsavoury still. The structure of his sentences is often erratic, and he is never embarrassed by the importunities of grammar. Such necessary niceties he regarded with unconcern, or as a mark of coxcombry or pedantry; in learning and literature he hated both. What he valued was mother wit; and he was content to express it in his mother tongue. He was not inclined to cavil at a word which had been good enough for Rabelais, nor was French the less French for being Tourangeau, as that great master proved. Such licence however as he took, he could well afford to take. D'Argenson's style resembles his statesmanship. Delicacy, finesse, those smaller aptitudes that come by practice, he had never been able to acquire; yet he displays no slight command of the larger qualities of style. His writing wins us, not by the charm of symmetry and grace, but by the kind of rude dignity which comes of will and energy and power. He cleaves his way to his own meaning with a certain two-handed effectiveness by no means unimposing; and we have never to fear having lost one jot or tittle of the idea he is trying to convey. Often ungrammatical, he is never obscure. The reader has scarcely a knot to unravel in the whole nine volumes of his Journal. Though unformed and unrefined by art, his literary instinct is of the

surest. He never misses the point of a story, or fails to convey it to his readers. His handling of episodes, grave, sure and convincing, compels the regret that he was not born poor, in order that he might have achieved distinction as a master of style. But the binding charm of d'Argenson is his perennial flow and freshness. Brisk, alert, ever unwearied, his reader cannot weary of him. His vitality scatters the dust from his pages, leaving them bright as the day they were written. He is a foe, as ever, to pomp and ceremony; his narrative opens readily, it closes with a clasp. He has none of St. Simon's breadth of elaboration; yet he has something which makes us feel, as we lay down the ninth volume, that we owe the writer no grudge, and that if life were long enough, we would open a tenth with unblunted curiosity and pleasure.

Indeed the style is a faithful reflection of the man—perhaps the most faithful we possess. Known only through his acts, we know him only as he was spoilt by his unhappy training. It is in his writings that we see the real man, as he was by himself and as he strove to be with others. In the world he was stiff, shy, rudely straightforward, despising chicanery and abhorring clamour. Alone in his library he was another being, free, natural, powerful, and great. From the windows he could look out upon a world unthinking, heedless, the prey of knaves and the sport of fools, and needing to be guided by a philosopher and an honest man. His belief that he was wise and strong enough to give such guidance may be called an illusion, if any

one thinks it worth while. Within those walls the illusion, if illusion it was, was a very natural one; and natural or not, we have no right to complain, for it has bequeathed to us one of the most interesting of journals and revealed to us one of the most interesting of men.

D'Argenson's life during these last ten years is seen upon an engaging background, the château and domain of Segrez, about thirty miles from Paris. It was a very charming place, which its master loved, and was fond of describing both with pen and pencil.[1] He used to liken it to the Elysian Fields,[2] and if his own affectionate sketches of it are to be trusted, the hyperbole may readily be pardoned. There he passed the years of his retirement, organising his correspondence, inditing his Journal, entertaining his friends, and protecting the peasantry against the revenue officers.[3] Sometimes too in moments of blissful idleness, he would prop himself up in that portable reading cabinet which M. Aubertin has made so famous,[4] and laugh and weep through a translation of "Tom Jones,"[5] a new book by that ingenious writer, Mr. Henry Fielding. His life was broken by an occasional visit to the Court or to his family estates in Touraine; and he was constantly in and out of Paris. Often might he be seen descending from the mud-bespattered coach, reading with affright and horror some placards which the police had not yet torn down, condoling with one of his learned friends in the agitated court of the Palais de

[1] 405. [2] 406. [3] 407. [4] 408. [5] 409.

Justice, denouncing the Jesuits in the company of d'Alembert, or hurrying away to preside at a meeting of the Academy of Letters.[1] But his heart was always thirty miles away. We can picture him, after an exciting month at Paris, arriving at Segrez, handing off his cloak, flinging himself into the arms of some cherished chair, and dreaming of a week of peace and solitude.

"Here I am again in the country for six days. I shall have less news of the world and the Court, but far better news of myself. How delightful it is to be at rest, in the company of oneself and one's books!

"Yesterday evening there was a beautiful aurora borealis, and immediately afterwards the weather cleared up and the wind veered round to the south. There is good promise for the harvest. The rain came when it was wanted, and the crops, kept back by the cold weather we have been having lately, are now coming forward in fine style."[2]

At this time d'Argenson presents a pleasant picture, the picture of a man who has striven, and not in vain. He had not obtained all he had hoped for, but what he had achieved was no little thing. It is easy to have the defects of one's qualities; it is harder to acquire, as d'Argenson had done, the very qualities of his defects. The vices of his nature he had employed more usefully than many virtues. Cut off from the many, he had won his way into the ranks of the elect; if he could not be witty, he could at least be wise. Fortune had

[1] 410. [2] 411.

decreed his failure as a politician: she could not deny him the secondary distinction of being, as a political thinker, the foremost man of his time. And this was the end of a lifelong struggle, not unworthy of his stubborn blood. True that he had faults, and retained them to the last; and to the last he strove to quell them. They were in spite of him; his greatness was his own. Faults though they be, they are not unamiable; their generous admission extorts generosity: and they have forgiven them most readily who have known them best. If, under the pen of M. Edmond Scherer [1] and others less distinguished than he, they have been raised to a hateful prominence of contumely, they have been reduced to their due place of utter subordination by the humanity and the insight of an Aubertin [2] and a Ste. Beuve.

The Marquis d'Argenson died on the 26th of January, 1757. Rousseau five years afterwards inscribed his epitaph—

"UN VRAI CITOYEN." [3]

[1] 412. [2] 413. [3] 414.

VI.

1737–1755.

The "Considérations"—The Plan of 1737—The Plan of 1755.

"*Il faut être autant en garde contre la réforme que contre les abus.*"—"Considérations" (1784).

It was not to be imagined that the man who watched so anxiously the progress of the malady, and marked with such sensitive precision the quickening of the pulse, could do so from a mere cold interest in social pathology. D'Argenson felt the distemper as if it had been his own. He was devotedly, even extravagantly patriotic; and his political criticism might have been less pungent had the subjects of invective been less personal to himself. He could have neither patience nor charity for men who could fiddle while Rome was burning. Powerless as he was, he was at least above that reproach.

Seven years after d'Argenson's death there appeared a very remarkable book. It was called

"Considérations sur le Gouvernement de la France,"
or
"Jusqu' où la Démocratie peut être admise dans le Gouvernement Monarchique."

It was written by him in 1737, the year of Chauvelin's disgrace. It is upon this work or upon notices of it that d'Argenson's reputation as a political thinker is principally based. It is necessary to examine it carefully, and in the light of the circumstances under which it was composed. The author would turn in his grave could he hear the verdict which has generally been passed upon it; for if there was one imputation which d'Argenson abhorred and strove to avoid, it was that of being a visionary possessed by chimeras.

The consideration of this book is not so easy as it at first appears. It is less known than it certainly deserves to be, and we are dependent for our knowledge of it upon a couple of old editions, published in 1764 [1] and 1784. The work consists of a number of dissertations on the past history and present condition of the French Government, which serve as the setting for its central feature, a Plan or project of reform. In the preface to the edition of 1784, which was issued by the d'Argenson family, the previous publication is noticed, and we

[1] 415.

are told that it is grossly imperfect, and that unwarrantable liberties have been taken with the author's text. Upon consulting the earlier edition, the discrepancies are at once apparent, and nowhere so noticeably as in the very Plan which is the most important section of the work. To begin with, the Plan which, in 1784, is given in the form of a royal proclamation in thirty-four articles, appears in the issue of 1764 as an informal draft consisting of fifty-two. And the difference is not of form alone; for on comparing the two Plans we find that they are as far apart as are the poles asunder, and that the second might represent, at the ordinary rate at which history proceeds, a century's advance in breadth of thought. In some bewilderment we turn to the four manuscripts preserved in the Library of the Arsenal;[1] and confusion is further confounded by the discovery that it is with the very Plan of this maligned edition of 1764 that that of the manuscripts coincides. The manuscripts themselves are clearly authentic: for they bear annotations in d'Argenson's handwriting. A question at once arises as to the authenticity of the scheme of 1784. A comparison of the texts establishes the fact that in spite of the impeachment of one editor and the apologies of another, both editions are equally genuine, and represent different stages of the work. Moreover it is evident that that of 1784 is mainly a revised and enlarged version of the original, and was probably executed about the year 1750; and further, that in it the

[1] 416.

editor, without a word of explanation, has incorporated a Plan, a Chapter and a Conclusion, of much later date and with a very different purpose.

The "Considérations," as written in 1737, is founded upon two principles. D'Argenson felt that for the rapid and decisive action which a great nation should be able to employ, a strong and united government was necessary: and that in the Monarchy France possessed such a government. He saw at the same time that that government had charged itself with a multitude of minute concerns which it could not possibly understand or supervise, and that consequently the rural districts were neglected, and local administration throughout the country was in a shameful state of nullity or disorder. He proposed therefore to disband the great army of subaltern officials who worked or shirked in the pay of the Sub-delegates, and with an emancipation of thought which is truly astonishing, to hand over their duties to popular control. With that object he devised the following scheme.

Henceforth the business of each city, borough or village (*ville, bourg et village*), should be managed by a committee of the inhabitants, to the number of five or more. Persons eligible for service in that capacity should be nominated in an annual meeting of the inhabitants; and the officers should be appointed from among the nominees by, and at the discretion of, the Sub-delegate. The latter, while ceasing to interfere directly in parochial concerns, should maintain a general control and supervision, and should have a discretionary power to displace

the local officers for dereliction of duty or other misconduct. In matters affecting more than one district the local authorities might confer together, after specifying the subjects of the conference, and obtaining from the Sub-delegate a formal warrant. The national taxes should henceforth be raised in the form of a communal grant, equal in amount to the sum hitherto obtained from the taille; it was to be assessed upon the inhabitants of the district by the local authority, and paid in by them to the Financial Receivers, who should be, in addition to the Intendants and Sub-delegates, the only royal officers. The reform should be introduced gradually, and might be submitted to experiment in certain districts in the neighbourhood of Paris, and in the wards of Paris itself. In any attempt to introduce it, the authority of the Crown must be scrupulously maintained.[1]

Such are the principal, and from a constitutional point of view, the only essential features of the project of 1737. It is with this scheme that M. Martin deals in his notice of d'Argenson. He concludes a summary of it with a critical remark which is characteristic of the tone not infrequently held with regard to d'Argenson and his proposals. He says:—

"Monarchy without nobility, without a judicial aristocracy, and without a bureaucracy, royalty suspended without supports at an enormous height above a democratic society—there is d'Argenson's dream: illusion of a noble heart!" etc.

[1] 417.

"*Un ministre stipule pour le Roi, mais il travaille et craint pour lui-même.*"—"Considérations" (1764).

In this judgment M. Martin displays somewhat less than his usual acumen. Certain abusive privileges might have been touched: but not a rank in the social hierarchy connecting the Crown with the tiny democratic communities, would have been menaced by d'Argenson's scheme.[1] Moreover to speak of "Royalty" and "democratic society" in connection with it, is to employ large words to describe what is after all a very little thing; by using these wide and general terms the idea is dilated and swollen till it becomes grotesque. What d'Argenson proposed was simply to dismiss the score or so of clerks, tax-collectors and hangers-on who managed parochial affairs under the direction of the Sub-delegate without sympathy or regard for the wishes of the people: and to transfer these affairs to a little parish council, consisting, for example, of the neighbouring squire, the village curé, a couple of farmers, and an erudite cobbler or so, who would look after the roads, assist the poor, assess and collect the parochial taxes, and attend to all matters which were not beyond the capacity of half-a-dozen intelligent countrymen, guided and supervised by the Sub-delegate. The two poles upon which the system revolved were not "royalty" and "a democratic society,"[2] but in plain prose, the bureau of the Controller-General at Versailles, and the parish room or the inn parlour of the

[1] 418. [2] 419.

village of Argenson in the "généralité" of Touraine. In fact we have an almost exact parallel in the by no means fantastic relations which exist in nearly every parish in England between the local School Board and the Education Department at Whitehall.

It cannot be supposed, as M. Martin would appear to imply, that the Crown and the Vestry could neither co-operate nor co-exist. D'Argenson, in drafting his proposal, presumed upon both sides at least the average amount of sense which is ordinarily devoted to matters of government. So far as he could see, there was no reason why the parish councils should ever dream of giving trouble; and he could not conceive any Government perverse enough to provoke them to a national combination for resistance. He imagined, on the other hand, that local affairs would be managed better, and could not be managed worse, than they were; and that in any case life would be awakened in the provincial districts, and that they would be rescued from the torpor of death into which they were rapidly subsiding. Surely this was something more than the illusion of a noble heart.

It is entirely in accordance with the fitness of things that the best criticism of d'Argenson's plan is that of one of his own contemporaries, who was better able than any one now can be to understand the difficulty which pressed for solution. Voltaire, as we have seen, received the manuscript about eighteen months after its completion; and his quick intelligence was in no danger of mistaking

"*Le temps de l'Aristocratie est passé quand le Despotisme s'est établi sans son secours.*"—"Considérations" (1784).

the meaning of his friend's proposal. He wrote to him:—[1]

"It seems to me that you have elucidated in a consecutive system the vague ideas and the heartfelt wishes of every good citizen.

"Is not England a standing witness to the truth of your ideas? The King with his Parliament is legislator, as in France with his Council. The rest of the nation is governed according to municipal laws, as sacred as those of Parliament itself. The love of law has become a passion among this people, because every one is interested in the maintenance of the law. All the highroads are kept in order, hospitals founded and maintained, commerce flourishing, without the necessity of a decree of Council. This idea is the more admirable in that you are yourself a member of this Council, and that in you the love of your own authority yields to the love of the public good."[2]

There was only one point on which Voltaire was at variance with his friend; and its consideration will lead us to that other proposal for which, nearly twenty years later, the present was abandoned by its author. Before leaving this scheme of 1737 a few concluding reflections have to be made.

To us in England at the present day this Plan seems a very modest one; but we may readily forget the breadth of thought, the marvellous political

[1] 420. [2] 421.

instinct, which could have conceived it in the France of 1737. To realise the depth of d'Argenson's discernment, we have only to compare the "Considérations" with the famous book by which it was evoked,[1] "L'Histoire de l'ancien Gouvernement de la France." M. de Boulainvilliers and d'Argenson had been struck by the same evils; but the former attributed them to the iniquitous usurpation by which the people had been withdrawn from the protection of their feudal lords, and subjected to oppression by the irresponsible minions of the royal authority. His remedy was a reversion to the society of the thirteenth century. D'Argenson's proposal was a very different one. He saw very clearly that as a great political instrument the French noblesse existed no longer; and that if local government was to be reformed, the reform must come from the people themselves. If these shopkeepers, peasants and the rest, had no political tradition or knowledge, they were primarily concerned in acquiring it; and he enunciates, perhaps for the first time, the great principle of all democratic development, the principle that in matters of government interest is more valuable than intelligence. Astonishing as it may seem, he had perfect confidence in the men to whom he proposed to entrust a modest share of influence and power: and he expressed it in a few golden words which suggest the spirit of his scheme:—

"Insensiblement ces magistrats, quoique paysans,

[1] 422.

se ressentiront de leur caractère, et en prendront le véritable esprit, qui éloigne également de la basse soumission et de l'insolence." [1]

Even to Rousseau, the tramp of genius, who had eaten black bread and slept in cabins, the democratic faith came gradually and as an inspiration; but what are we to think of the French nobleman who had conceived it twenty-five years before as he talked with the labourers round his château?

One of the most striking features of this Plan of 1737 is the care which is taken to safeguard the royal authority. The local officers are placed under the absolute control of the Sub-delegates, and the unit of popular action is nothing more formidable than the parish or the ward. "*Divide et impera*" was the legislator's device. To us who have daily experience of the harmonious working of local and central institutions, this solicitude may appear a little singular. To d'Argenson however it was not so. His devotion to the Crown was hereditary; and he shared the belief in the sovereign virtues of monarchical government which was held unanimously in 1737. Any project which would tend in the slightest degree to impair the authority of the Crown, could neither be proposed by him nor listened to by others. It was this point which drew from Voltaire his only suggestion of dissent. The poet had been travelling in England and Holland; and his natural reverence for the Monarchy had been qualified by an acquaintance

[1] 423.

with republican societies. He had very little faith in Louis XV., and he expresses the real weakness of his friend's proposals in a single trenchant line. D'Argenson had averred [1] that when the King has nothing to think of but governing, he will always govern well.

"Well then," exclaims Voltaire, "for God's sake let the King think of governing!" [2]

At that date, with the history of Louis Quatorze behind him, and before him his hopes of Louis Quinze, d'Argenson could have no uneasiness upon that score. It took twenty years of experience of the Monarchy at close quarters, of further knowledge of the actual principles by which it was conducted, to show him how far and fatally the reality fell short of the ideal design. In the few years that elapsed between his disgrace and death, he came to understand that excellent as absolutism may be in theory, it has certain disadvantages in fact: and that for one monarch who is found to satisfy the standard of sovereign virtue, there are twenty who fall immeasurably beneath it. At the cost of the convictions of a lifetime he accepted the truth that the only warrant of the people against anarchy or oppression lay in their own power of self-defence; and he felt that if strength and virtue were to be restored to the Government, the people must be placed in a position where they would at once be able to assist it to do good, and have absolute power to prevent it doing harm. What the country needed was no longer a great adminis-

[1] 424. [2] 425.

trative reform, but nothing less than a national constitution.

That constitution d'Argenson endeavoured to work out; and the fruit of his reflections was the scheme published in 1784. It cannot be discussed in the light of experience; for it never was, nor had a chance of being, submitted to the test of practice. It was not until twenty-eight years after the author's death that it first saw the light; and by that time popular demands had become loud and instant, while a constitutional ideal of a wholly different type had taken possession of the mind of France. Still there is a certain sense developed by acquaintance with history and politics which enables us to estimate with approximate justice the worth of any particular project in relation to a given set of circumstances; and upon that sense it is necessary to rely. There is reason to suggest that if examined in the light of such knowledge as we have of the state of the Government and of popular feeling about the year 1755, the constitution d'Argenson conceived at that time is by no means least among the many proofs of his extraordinary political wisdom.

As few documents of so much importance are so inaccessible or so little known,[1] a brief abstract of this remarkable scheme may not be without use. In presenting it, the form of the original, that of a royal proclamation, is, so far as possible, preserved; while some striking passages, which illustrate the prevailing tone and spirit, are given in

[1] 426.

"*Les Rois n'aiment point à être Tyrans; mais la plupart le sont sans le savoir.*"—"Considérations" (1784).

d'Argenson's own words. In considering it, it is necessary to remember two things. In the first place, though popular criticism is irascible and alert, it has yet made but little way; the people, though beginning to despise the monarch, are still devoted to the monarchical tradition. Further it has to be borne in mind that when the Government did endeavour to act with vigour and to prosecute measures of constructive reform, it was hampered and clogged at every turn by the influence of the privileged orders: while there was no great popular organisation upon which it could lean for support.

The Constitution is set forth in thirty-four articles, the substance of which is as follows:—

PLAN FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF FRANCE.

(Ed. 1784.)

Louis, &c. Whereas our royal authority, however acquired, has been given us for the happiness of our people, we desire that this our people should co-operate with us in our efforts to attain so desirable an end. Our will is set forth in the articles here following.

I.

The ancient divisions of our Realm into Provinces shall continue, though all feudal relation connected therewith shall hereby cease.

The internal administration of the provinces shall be uniform; and "they shall have more freedom than any among them has hitherto enjoyed."

No landed property shall be exempt from the common burdens:

> "Et que la noblesse, quelque ancienne qu'elle soit, ni aucun emploi, charge ni dignité, soit un titre pout dispenser nos sujets de payer les impositions réelles et personnelles."

II.

The subsisting divisions of the Provinces into districts "of greater or less extent" shall remain very much as before. They shall retain their ancient usages, but notwithstanding shall be mutually independent in respect of administration.

III.

Each District shall be further subdivided into cities, boroughs, and parishes (or divisions composed of several villages); and each of these subdivisions shall have its own officers charged

with matters of finance and police. These officers shall be chosen from among the persons living, and holding property, in the place itself. The election shall take place in an annual meeting (assemblée) convened for the purpose.

IV.

Immediate steps shall be taken to prepare a Schedule, or statement of property and income, to cover each District and to serve as the basis of assessment.

V.

In each District there shall be holden an annual Assembly, which shall last fifteen days, and which shall consist of:

(*a*) The officers of the principal city of the District.

(*b*) One deputy from each of the boroughs.

(*c*) A certain number of the officers of the Parishes and smaller divisions (arrondissements) to be returned in rotation.

The holders of large landed properties may also attend.

In this Assembly the financial and other affairs of the District shall be transacted, and deputies shall be chosen to represent the District in the Provincial Estates.

"*La liberté est l'appui du Trône: l'ordre rend légitime la liberté.*"—"Considérations" (1764).

VI.

In each of the Provinces of our Realm there shall be holden Provincial Estates, which shall consist of deputies chosen in the District Assemblies.

The Estates shall also include certain great landholders (Propriétaires), to whom the perpetual right to be present at the Estates will be granted in consideration of the dignity and extent of their possessions in the Province, of which they shall be regarded as the Peers.

VII.

Such members of the nobility as have a right to attend the Estates shall have certain privileges of ceremony and none other.

It is our pleasure that the nobility do not constitute a separate body in the said Estates; and that no person of birth, however noble, shall be present, who is not either a deputy from some District, or who does not hold property which connects his interests intimately with those of the Province.

Such Peers of the Province may be present by proxy.

> "Nous aurons nous-mêmes pour les terres dont nous conserverons la domaine utile, des Représentans (qui seront tout à fait distincts

de nos Commissaires), dont les fonctions se borneront à opiner comme membres des États, et dont la voix ne sera comptée dans les délibérations générales que comme celle des autres Propriétaires : nous fondant sur ce principe incontestable, que l'autorité de nos Provinces reste toute entière entre nos mains : que nous confions aux États que la seule administration, c'est-à-dire l'exécution de nos ordres, la répartition juste et exacte des charges que nous croyons utiles et nécessaires d'imposer, le droit de nous éclairer sur les besoins de chaque Province et sur les mesures à prendre pour en augmenter la population et le commerce, et la liberté de nous représenter les abus que pourraient faire de nos ordres ceux qui les reçoivent immédiatement de nous." [1]

VIII.

To each of the Provincial Estates there shall be attached a Syndic-General (or president), a Secretary-General, and a Treasurer-General.

"Celui-ci touchera de chaque Receveur particulier [2] le montant des impositions de son District, fera passer au Trésor Royal la partie des impositions qui devra y être versée pour contribuer aux dépenses générales du Royaume : conservera entre ses mains la portion destinée à subvenir aux besoins de

[1] 427. [2] 428.

la Province et à procurer des avantages à ses habitants : l'emploiera conformément aux ordres des commissaires des États : sera comptables à nos ministres des finances de la recette et de la dépense du premier genre, et aux États et à ses commissaires de celle du second genre."

To each District Assembly shall likewise be attached a Syndic, a Secretary, and a Receiver.

IX.

The Provincial Estates shall be opened by four Royal Commissioners, who shall explain the amount of the contribution assessed upon the Province.

"Quand ces impositions seront plus considérables qu'elles ne l'étaient les années précédentes, ils en expliqueront les motifs, afin que nos peuples soient parfaitement instruits des raisons qui nous déterminent à imposer de nouvelles charges ; mais d'ailleurs, il ne sera pas à l'option des États d'accorder ou de refuser, de restreindre ou de modifier, les charges qui leur seront imposées."

Notwithstanding the Estates, after making due arrangements for the execution of our orders, shall be privileged to present representations in regard to them.

"Nous les recevrons toujours avec bonté, et nous nous ferons un devoir d'y répondre article par article."

The Royal Commissioners shall likewise present to the Estates the different Regulations with regard to police, commerce, and civil and military administration. They shall in all cases be accepted by the Estates, who shall then have power to make representations in regard to them.

"Nous proscrivons à jamais le mot et l'idée de don gratuit."

X.

After arranging for the execution of our will, the Estates may give their attention to any measures affecting the Province which they may desire to propose to us (solliciter auprès de nous); their petitions shall be presented by deputies. Matters not requiring our sanction shall be disposed of finally by the Estates, and the officers of the Crown shall second them in the prosecution of their arrangements.

XI.

The Estates shall meet at the end of every November, and shall dissolve at the beginning of the following January. Before dissolving they shall elect an executive commission, consisting of one of the deputies from each District and the three principal officers of the Estates. The Commission shall hold office until the meeting of the Assembly next ensuing.

Four deputies shall also be elected to reside at Court as the representatives of the Estates.

The District Assemblies shall likewise elect a small executive commission.

XII.

The four Royal Commissioners shall appoint subordinates to control the troops, to execute orders committed to them by their superiors, and to report to them events as they occur. These officers shall have no power to give any orders in their own name, or to employ force against the inhabitants except in cases of the last emergency; they shall at once report such cases to their superiors, at whose will they may be deprived of their posts.

Our Commissioners shall hold office during our royal pleasure. Their salaries and those of their subordinates shall be charged upon the general expenses of the Kingdom; and no officer in the direct service of the Crown shall touch one penny of the Provincial revenue.

On the other hand, the maintenance of the Provincial executive shall fall entirely upon the Province.

XIII.

The Revenue of the Crown shall be collected by, and at the expense of, the Provincial Estates, "whose business it will be to make this collection as inexpensively as possible, and by the method

"*Fixer des lois à un abus, c'est l'autoriser et le rendre durable.*"—"Considérations" (1764–1784).

the least disagreeable to the people." It shall be paid entire into the Royal Treasury.

In the same manner, the Provincial Revenue shall be collected by, and shall remain at the absolute disposition of, the Estates.

XIV.

The Provincial Treasurers shall be accountable to our Council of Finance and our Chamber of Accounts at Paris, for the revenues of the Crown: and to the Provincial Estates for those of the Province.

XV.

These measures will involve the disappearance of the Receivers-general, the Receivers of the Taille, the Receivers-general of Domains and Woods, all the officers of Waters and Forests, the Treasurers of Roads and Bridges, and all persons employed in the construction of high roads and public buildings: their duties devolving upon the administration of the Provinces and Districts. All expenses in connection with the "Aides, Gabelles, Traites et autres droits des Fermes" will lapse, the dues in question being collected by the officials of the Province in conjunction with the rest of the taxes. There shall also be suppressed the Treasurerships of France, the Provincial Chambers of Accounts, the

Courts of Aides, and the "Élections." Persons subjected to forfeiture will receive compensation.

XVI.

The offices of the Governors, Lieut.-Governors and Lieutenants of the Provinces, and also those of the "Baillis d'épée," shall be suppressed.

XVII.

Questions in dispute between different local authorities shall be decided, if possible, by the superior authority, or, in default, by our Council.

XVIII.

The dispensation of justice shall remain the prerogative of the Crown.

The administration of justice shall be rendered uniform, and the high seigneurial jurisdictions shall be suppressed.

XIX.

(Provides certain rules of judicial procedure.)

XX.

The laws of the nation, local customs and corporate charters shall be revised; but shall only be abrogated in so far as they may be found contrary to natural equity, morality, and public order,

"Persuadés qu'il ne faut pas faire perdre, sans une véritable nécessité, les habitudes anciennement contractées, et qui sont compatibles avec le maintien de la tranquillité des familles et de la bonne police."

XXI.

(Prescribes method of revision.)

XXII.

The administrative arrangements already existing shall remain in force until the promulgation of the reforms designed to supersede them. It is our intention to suppress "la vénalité des charges de judicature"; persons subjected to forfeiture will receive compensation.

XXIII.

To certain posts in the department of Finance alone shall a pecuniary interest be attached, as a guarantee for the integrity of the holders.

The system of official reversions (survivances) shall be wholly suppressed.

Steps will be taken to provide for the efficiency of the service of the Crown, both administrative and judicial.

XXIV.

The payment of the Royal officers shall be arranged in the interests of the people;

Il faut savoir économiser les graces les plus justes comme les supplices les plus sévères."—" Considérations " (1784).

" Nous voulons leur épargner par ce moyen des faux frais qui leur seraient infiniment plus couteux. D'un autre côté, nous ferons en sorte que nos officiers supérieurs et subalternes trouvent dans la prompte expédition des affaires autant d'avantages qu'ils en trouveraient en les faisant traîner."

XXV.

No person in holy orders (clerc) shall henceforth be admitted to any share in the civil administration, " the constant work " demanded by the latter being inconsistent with the performance of his duties as an ecclesiastic.

XXVI., XXVII., XXVIII.

There shall be no evocation of provincial causes for judgment in the capital (XXVI.). Appeals (requêtes en cassation) shall be done away with so far as possible (XXVII.). The constitution of our " Conseil des Parties " shall be reformed (XXVIII.).

XXIX.

" Quant aux ordres qui s'expédient en notre nom, et qui tendent à priver quelques-uns de

nos sujets de leur liberté et à les éloigner de leur état ou de leur domicile ordinaire, nous ne voulons point qu'il en soit donné sans une approbation précise de notre main, que nous n'accorderons jamais que sur le rapport au moins d'un de nos ministres, secrétaires ou conseillers d'État, qui nous en garantira la justice et la nécessité, et signera sur la feuille qui nous sera présentée."

XXX.

" La gloire et la grandeur de la noblesse de notre Royaume qui nous est si cher à tant de titres, consistant bien plus dans le souvenir des services que nous ont rendus ses ancêtres et dans le mérite de ceux qu'elle nous rende elle-même que dans le vain honneur de jouir de certaines exemptions qui n'empèchent pas les nobles de partager avec le reste de nos sujets le poids des impositions : et qui, si elles avaient plus d'effet, seraient injustes, puisque la partie la plus pauvre et la plus laborieuse de notre nation ne pourrait pas supporter seule le fardeau pesant mais nécessaire des impôts : nous jugeons à propos d'abolir les distinctions établies entre les nobles et les roturiers, qui assujetissent ceux-ci à payer la taille et en exemptent les autres, d'autant plus que notre intention est de rendre la taille réelle par toute l'étendue de notre Royaume, et d'abolir la taille personelle.

"Enfin nous réduisons tous les priviléges de notre noblesse à des droits purement honorifiques, et à la considération résultante d'une naissance ancienne et illustre, sans que ce genre de gloire puisse jamais autoriser aucun acte de tyrannie, ni rien qui tende à la surcharge de nos peuples."

XXXI.

It shall no longer be possible to buy a patent of nobility.

XXXII.

In no charge, office, or post in connection with the judicial or administrative bodies shall any proof of nobility be required. Notwithstanding the Noblesse are encouraged to serve in these posts.

"Nous ne prétendons pas même que les emplois les plus subalternes ou le commerce en détail entraînent pour les anciens gentilhommes d'autre dérogeance qu'une suspension passagère de leurs titres honorables,"

which their descendants may at any time resume.

XXXIII.

(Provides for the constitution of a heraldic Court.)

XXXIV.

The Catholic Establishment shall be maintained as

> "la base de la morale, dont le maintien est essentiel à la tranquillité et au bonheur public. Ceux que auraient le malheur de n'être pas convaincus des vérités qu'elle nous enseigne"

will be ineligible for public office; but no step shall be taken in the direction of persecution or proscription.

Complete toleration shall be maintained in so far as it is compatible with public order.

Such was the constitution projected by d'Argenson during the few years before his death. Its real meaning is clear and unmistakable: yet it has not escaped the evil fortune which has pursued so many of its author's plans. It is true that to concede to thirty-two provincial assemblies a virtually absolute power, while providing that the authority of the Crown shall be in no way diminished, may appear at first sight as strange an inconsequence as M. de Broglie [1] and others have found it. Yet a patient reading of d'Argenson's scheme is sufficient to show that with all its elaborate reservations, it involved nothing more nor less than the provisional surrender of the Sovereignty of France into the hands of the French people.

It is to be remembered that in the years which

[1] 429.

succeeded the peace of Aix-la-Chapelle, d'Argenson had been watching with growing alarm the disaffection which was beginning to ferment : [1] and at the same time his old belief in the sovereign virtues of absolutism had been profoundly modified by a more lengthened experience.[2] We have only to bear in mind this change of opinion in considering his project of reform, to be alive to the numerous hints which it contains and to detect the real significance of its provisions. What d'Argenson proposed was virtually this : the whole administration of the interior was to be ceded to the people of France, organised in their parishes, districts, and provinces ; the royal bureaucracy, the entire system of intendancies and sub-delegacies was to be swept away ; and the Crown was to be represented in each Province by four Royal Commissioners, who should open the Estates at the end of November and explain to the deputies the wishes of the King, while leaving the execution of them to the Provincial government. These Royal Commissioners had power to appoint a flying squadron of subordinates, who were attached to no particular place nor any defined duty, whose principal business was to report to their superiors, and who were strictly forbidden to act upon their own authority, or, except in cases of the last emergency, to employ force against the people. Within the province not only the whole administration, but the assessment, collection and payment of the taxes, was entirely in the hands of the Estates.

[1] 430. [2] 431.

"*La guerre se faisait alors en nature, et actuellement elle se fait, pour ainsi dire, en argent.*"—"Considérations" (1784).

We cannot mistake the possible significance of these proposals, however implicitly it be conveyed. The provision that the King alone should make laws and impose taxes might be really little more than a constitutional fiction, which, so long as the laws were prudently made and the taxes equitably imposed, might pass as undisputed fact. The proposition that the royal ordinances must always be accepted might prove to be a fiction of the same kind. Indeed, in certain eventualities the whole scheme might be one continued fiction in so far as it relates to the Crown. The Provincial Estates shall not legislate, but they shall have power to present bills for the royal ratification. What will happen if their petitions are rejected is a question for time and circumstance, and not for legislation, to decide. In the same way the Estates must accept the contribution assessed upon them: but they may present representations in regard to it. If those representations are neglected the Estates will proceed as their power and wisdom may dictate. In a word, the absolute power of the Crown in legislation was conditioned only by the proper use of it.

D'Argenson had arrived at the conviction that the causes of the evil from which the country was suffering were the practical nullity of the Crown and the political nullity of the people; and he felt that the remedy was to be found in the admission

of the people to a share of power. He knew not less than any of his critics, that where power is divided differences will arise; but he saw no reason to doubt that if King and people were guided by a common patriotism and mutual respect, such differences need never issue in violent collision. At the same time he knew that when the interests of the King were obstinately opposed to those of the people, such collisions would occur; they were calamitous, but they were the lesser of two calamities. He declares that in the case of "a King who is worthy of the name," such divergence of interest need never be feared. Should there be a King who was not worthy of the name, he might be left to the discretion of an indignant people, and of the most daring and determined man who happened at the moment to possess their confidence. It was none of d'Argenson's concern.

It is true that we do not find him stating, in this uncompromising way, the revolutionary aspect of his programme; he would have shrunk from formulating it clearly even to himself. At the same time we know that it was by no means distant from his mind. Notwithstanding, he cannot have regarded it as of any immediate or direct importance; for he could not but think that only by an access of inconceivable folly on the part of the people or of inconceivable madness on the part of the Crown, could such a revolutionary ferment be occasioned.

We cannot better appreciate the spirit and scope of d'Argenson's proposal than by comparing it with

the universally admired design broached, about twenty years later, by the great minister Turgot. The principle of the two policies was practically the same. Turgot proposed, like d'Argenson, to entrust to the people and popular organisations the whole administration of the interior, while retaining the entire legislative authority in the hands of the Crown.[4] The people, as in d'Argenson's scheme, had merely the power of suggesting legislation, though the actual law must proceed from the King. Between the two plans, however, there was one great difference of detail. D'Argenson had surrounded the authority of the Crown with a sacred barrier; behind that barrier the people might exercise all the effective powers of popular control: beyond it they were forbidden to pass. In the proposal of Turgot that barrier was destroyed. Above the circle of Provincial Estates he desired to constitute a Municipality of the Whole Realm; by doing so he would have brought the sphere of popular action into direct juxtaposition with that of the Crown, and have surrounded the very palace gates with the acclamations or with the clamour of the people.

Perhaps both policies, at their several periods, had equally little prospect of realisation; but if it were necessary to choose between them with regard to the state of feeling existing and likely to exist in France, the preference might be given to the earlier plan. For a time of disturbance and strain, it can claim one signal excellence,

[4] 432.

in attempting to provide for the maximum of exasperation with the minimum of indecency and danger. It is the great vice of central, but not sovereign assemblies that they can never come into collision with the Crown without inflicting a grievous blow upon the prestige and authority of the Crown. The veil which shroud it from the vulgar gaze, which surrounds it with an air of sacramental mystery, is torn into a thousand disreputable pieces, and the solemn difference between King and citizen is seen to fade guiltily away. D'Argenson feared, and had always feared, that blighting closeness of contact; and he endeavoured to preserve the influence of the Crown while placing the people in a position from which, in cases of the last emergency, they would be able to control the Crown. It is easy to see how the King at Versailles and a number of Estates in the provincial cities might have quarrelled to the verge of revolution, and yet how the King, by timely concession, might have retained his authority unimpaired.

Nor is it hard to answer the question which some have found it necessary to ask, and to sketch the progress of a revolution proceeding from the basis of d'Argenson's scheme. Had the Government become utterly despicable and bad, and had the King shown himself unable or unwilling to undertake reform, the Provincial Estates might have waited in patience until popular feeling was at fever height, and then they might have offered the King his choice between a national insurrection

"*Les jalousies réciproques des Princes Chrétiens sont peut-être aujourd'hui son appui le plus solide.*"—"Considérations" (1784). [Of the Turkish Empire.]

and the acceptance of a certain demand. That demand would have been that the hundred and twenty-eight deputies who represented the several Estates at the Court,[1] should be combined in a single assembly in order to concert measures for the future of the Kingdom. If the King had yielded, the deputies would have met, and have offered him the choice between a national insurrection and the acceptance of their advice. If he chose the latter alternative and endeavoured loyally to fulfil it, the assembly would disperse, matters would revert to their normal condition, and a politic effort would be made by all parties to forget the past. If, on the other hand, he remained contumacious, the people would resort to that last of political resources employed by England with such signal success a century and a half before. Such a state of things was never for a moment likely to arise. In 1755 the tradition of the French Monarchy remained unshaken.[2] A popular constitution would have been accepted as an act of grace; and the people would have been engaged too busily in remedying abuses to spend their strength in factious opposition. Only by suicidal folly on the part of the Crown could any danger have arisen. A moderate endowment of public spirit and common sense would have sufficed to protect the Government;

[1] 433. [2] 434.

and a monarch with one-half of the ability even of Louis XVI., or one tithe of the devotion maintained for generations in the House of Hohenzollern, would have been able to maintain his position with ease.

As a general constitutional proposition d'Argenson's plan is admirable enough; but when considered in relation to the paramount need of France at that particular moment it becomes a very master-work of statesmanship and sagacity. He alone could diagnose the conditions of the disease and discern the only remedy it was possible to apply. It is scarcely half the truth to say that the French Revolution was induced by bad government; there were times when the Government had been infinitely worse. The cause lay deeper. It lay in a social revolution which was already complete, and which the Crown refused to recognise.

By the middle of the eighteenth century the institutions of France had drifted into a condition of which history perhaps can afford no parallel. The aristocratic corporations of the Church, the law, and the land, whose influence the Crown for its own purposes had so often used and abused, were losing every particle of vital force; and the Monarchy found itself burdened and overborne by the weight of the great classes upon whom in times past it had leaned for support. The history of its last forty years is the history of a series of spasmodic efforts to rise to the grandeur of its great position: and the continual frustration of

those efforts through the stolid egotism of the privileged orders.

Why was it, it may be asked, that what had once been an inexhaustible source of strength had become a fatal element of weakness? The cause is to be found in a social revolution which had been silently proceeding for nearly a century. Ever since the time of Colbert, the middle classes, the class of tax-farmers, merchants and manufacturers, had been increasing rapidly in wealth and importance. It was not the mere growth of a bourgeoisie; it was the rise of a new society, whose leaders were ready to sow their wealth in the garden of art and letters. So it was that while lordly ineptitude upon the field of battle made the French Government a byword in Europe, the name of France was rendered illustrious by bourgeois triumphs in literature and the arts.

Coincident with the rise of the middle class was the declining influence of the Church and the Nobility. For fifty years the Church had been engaged in one of the most despicable party fights which history records; its most successful men were witty libertines, who officiated at the unhallowed sacrament of the "petit souper," and whose only belief in heaven or earth was in the redeeming virtues of a cardinal's hat. The nobles were despised by the best among them. They were hopelessly sunk in debt; and those whose magnificence paid no interest were subsisting on pensions dispensed by favourites and wrung from

wretches who fed on grass and had no stomach for resistance. The nobles were outshone by the farmers-general; the Church had ceded her empire to the "Philosophes"; while financier and "philosophe" were the social and intellectual leaders of a great society whose growth was transforming the aspect of France.

Had Fortune dealt as kindly with the Bourbon House as she had lately done with the failing Hapsburgs: could she have given to France in Louis XV. the latest and greatest of her kings, the Revolution might have been undreamed of, and the Bourbons absolute to this day. Such a man would have discerned the tendency of events: he would have thrown himself into line with it.[1] He would have sent his nobles beyond the Rhine, with a mission to die or to justify their existence; he would have crushed with an iron hand the pretensions of the Church; and turning Versailles into a national museum, he would have transferred his Court to the Louvre or the Tuileries, nor would he have allowed it to be surpassed in brilliance by the salons of the farmers-general.

By putting himself at the head of the new France, he might have renewed the tradition of the French Monarchy. Such might have been the work of a great King; but the Great King reviewed his squadrons on the plain of Potsdam, and devoted to France but a passing jest; and she was left to the guidance of one of the most pitiable and mean of men, who could do no more than watch

[1] 435.

"*C'est la déportation qui constitue principalement l'esclavage ; nul n'est facilement esclave dans son pays.*"—"Considérations" (1784).

the clouds and predict the bursting of "Le Déluge."

Effort to avert it there was none. Versailles displayed perhaps as strange a combination of pomp and vanity as was ever known in the history of the world. It retained the profusion, without the dignity, of the Grand Age; and public affairs went as they could while incapable nobles and dissolute Churchmen exchanged the shuttle of an endless intrigue. In tradition and spirit it was utterly alien from the new society. But one representative of the rising classes won her way into the charmed circle; she entered the Court as Madame d'Etioles; but before long the wife of the farmer-general was lost in Madame la Marquise de Pompadour. In public affairs the blindness was equally insensate. The King consented to trail his ermine in the slush of ecclesiastical quarrels; and such men as Tencin were the rulers of France, while Voltaire was reduced to crave the favour of some obscure lieutenant of police. When at last a man arises who will not take Madame's gifts, but will consent to copy her music, and who will not accept a hundred louis for work worth a dozen francs, he is spoken of as some strange kind of wild animal, "un original d'une nouvelle espèce," in Madame's own words.[1] And meanwhile the silver-tongued "bourreau" went on correcting his

[1] 436.

proofs—of the "Contrat Social"—and inditing the charter of those great classes which the French Monarchy continued to ignore.

No man had cherished more fondly than d'Argenson his hopes of Louis XV., and none had been more cruelly disappointed. He acknowledged at last that the Monarchy could not save itself; he would have tried to save it in spite of itself. His method was the only possible one. Flinging aside, like a damaged tool, the decrepit organisation of the privileged orders, he would have called in the assistance of that great people who held the future in the hollow of their hand. He would have given them power by their own efforts to redeem the vices of the Government, and to free that Government from the vesture of privilege and tradition which clung to it like the shirt of Nessus. For the two-fold evil from which France was suffering, his scheme provided a double remedy. The people had no power to demand good government; the Crown, burdened as it was by the privileged orders, had scarcely the power to afford it. D'Argenson would have given the people the necessary power: he would have given the Crown the necessary freedom: and he would have left it to the patriotism of the nation and the good sense of the King to restore prosperity to their common country.

D'Argenson's constitution died with him, and he who will may call it a dream.

It is a pity that such dreams are not more frequent.

END OF THE ESSAY.

For the portrait at the beginning of the book the author is obliged to the present Marquis d'Argenson. He is pleased to have this opportunity of thanking Mr. H. L. Samuel, of Balliol College, and also Mr. T. A. Vans Best and Mr. F. S. P. Swann, of Magdalen, for invaluable advice and help.

APPENDICES.

APPENDICES.

A.

THE FLASSAN MEMOIR.

This Memoir (see pp. 116–18 and note 312) is noticed by M. de Broglie, who rejects it as—

(i.) Probably unauthentic; as it has not been discovered by him or by M. Zevort among the ordinary sources; and

(ii.) Certainly unimportant; since it is nowhere referred to, as it assuredly would have been, in d'Argenson's Memoirs.

Now (i.) unless there existed, not merely this Memoir, but the whole policy of which it may have been a part, a considerable portion of the "Mémoires du Ministère" becomes unintelligible. That policy is constantly referred to throughout Book I., Art. 4 (Rathery, IV. pp. 239–66); and it is mentioned occasionally in the "Mémoires" of 1746, and in d'Argenson's Journal after he had ceased to be minister. Such a document, therefore, may naturally exist.

(ii.) This Memoir is given in Flassan, "Histoire de la Diplomatie Française," V. pp. 242–45 (published [second edition] in 1811). It deals with facts and not with ideas, and so cannot at once be recognised as d'Argenson's.

(iii.) On turning to the pages which precede the Memoir, we feel we are strangely familiar with M. Flassan's text. The

fact is explained by a comparison with Rathery, Vol. IV. We find, for instance, that Flassan, V. pp. 236–41, is positively little else than a verbal transcription from d'Argenson, "Mémoires du Ministère," I. Art. 4 (Rathery, IV. pp. 239–66). It is not a question of the use of an authority, but simply of the wholesale appropriation of his text. It is generally given in inverted commas, though the source does not appear to be mentioned; but in Flassan, V. p. 239, we find a paragraph, beginning "Quoique véritablement" (Rathery, IV. pp. 256–57), and two entire pages, "La Savoie," &c., pp. 240–42 (*cf.* Rathery, IV. pp. 257, 259–60), bodily transferred without acknowledgment, M. Flassan securing his interest in the whole by occasionally changing a word or an expression. An example of the process is a sentence, taken haphazard, on Flassan, V. p. 240; in four lines of letter-press the only alterations are "dans" (for d'Argenson's "sur"), and "domaine de l'Autriche" (for d'Argenson's "domaine autrichienne"; see Rathery, IV. p. 259, line 21). In fact, the whole account of the early part of d'Argenson's ministry is a conscientious copy of d'Argenson's text, M. Flassan confining himself to the transposition, or occasional omission, of paragraphs, and the changing of unimportant words. The transcription is from the original manuscripts then in possession of the d'Argenson family, and afterwards in the Library of the Louvre; and it was executed about fifty years before the editions either of Jannet or Rathery were issued from the press.

(iv.) The question suggested by the preceding is, how far is M. Flassan's account, and therefore presumably the Memoir in question, derived, borrowed, or taken from the manuscript of d'Argenson's "Mémoires du Ministère." The answer is that M. Flassan's obligations are nearly as great throughout the year 1746 as at the close of 1744; and the only other source of original information a brief examination has been able to disclose, are the letters and papers of Marshal de Noailles.

The inference is that the memoir ascribed to d'Argenson by a historian who had ransacked his papers, coinciding with d'Argenson's stated views (*cf.* Rathery, IV. p. 257), and found

among copious extracts from what Rathery reproduces as d'Argenson's text, is authentic.

There is scarcely need to fall back upon a second line of proof, if possible even more convincing.

(v.) In his Introduction to the "Mémoires," M. Rathery states (IV. pp. 127–28) that of the four volumes of Memoirs designed by d'Argenson, each containing twelve articles, only Arts. 1–4 of Vol. I. have been finally written. Arts. 5–12 of Vol. I. and the whole of Vol. II. were never edited, but remained in the form of notes and memoranda (IV. p. 125). The whole of Vol. III. exists, but imperfectly; and also Vol. IV., with the exception of the last few articles. In brief, the memoirs of the first six weeks of d'Argenson's ministry (Nov. 18–Dec. 31, 1744; "Mémoires," I. Arts. 1–4) are edited completely; *those of the year* 1745 ("Mémoires," I., Arts. 5–12, and II.) *are not edited at all*, but were left as notes and memoranda; and those of 1746 are edited, but imperfectly.

Now (vi.) we find that the second half of Flassan, Vol. V. book 4, is occupied with a careful and copious account of *the first six weeks* of d'Argenson's ministry (mostly in d'Argenson's own words); but no sooner are those first six weeks over than d'Argenson's manuscript and Flassan's fulness come to a sudden and simultaneous end; and the events of the whole year 1745 are disposed of in eight pages, of which the relations between France and Prussia occupy the four following lines:—

"En conséquence de cette communication [Frederick's proposal for peace, December, 1744, *see* this essay, p. 103], le roi de Prusse fit, le 25 décembre 1745, sa paix à Dresde, afin de s'assurer la Silésie, qu'il se fit garantir par l'Angleterre."

In the year 1746 (when the "Mémoires" are edited, but imperfectly) d'Argenson and M. Flassan are again intimately associated.

(vii.) The appearance of fulness given to the account of 1745 is produced by the insertion of three long memoirs: (*a*) this disputed memoir to Louis XV.; and (*b*) a couple more designed by d'Argenson for the king of Poland. The manner of their appearance is peculiar.

On p. 241 (Vol. V.), without any clear connection with the

preceding, M. Flassan writes an original twenty lines of introduction, and suddenly reproduces the Flassan Memoir (V. pp. 242–45). The Memoir is followed, not by any consecutive argument, or even by any original writing, but is simply wedged in its place with a couple of paragraphs taken word for word from d'Argenson's "Mémoires," I. Art. 4 (one of the articles perfectly edited, and referring to a period some time before). Comp. Flassan, V. p. 245, and Rathery, IV. p. 261.

Then follow the eight pages referred to above. They bring Book IV. to a close.

(viii.) Book V. opens with three pages of introduction (pp. 257–60),—certainly borrowed, we believe from d'Argenson's Journal (which was in manuscript along with the "Mémoires") —and these are followed (pp. 260–72) by the two long memoirs for the king of Poland. Now *these memoirs are written by d'Argenson.* Unlike the former, they deal with ideas and not with facts; and we recognise them at once. This is not a matter of argument; to question any one's opinion upon such a matter would be simply to impeach his knowledge of the man. The inference is clear. If these are d'Argenson's, so presumably is the other.

Having dealt with these memoirs, M. Flassan (V. p. 273) proceeds at a bound to the help given by France to the Chevalier St. George, or, in other words, to the end of 1745. In 1746 his task is easy.

In brief, we have a copious account of the wholly uneventful first six weeks; the eventful year 1745 is represented by eight pages of original writing, and three memoirs attributed to d'Argenson and wedged in their places with pieces of d'Argenson's text. We submit that the inference is as follows:—

That for his account of the year 1745, and of the last six weeks of 1744, M. Flassan relied entirely upon d'Argenson's manuscript; that he made copious use of the perfectly edited articles so long as they held out; and that, finding the year 1745 represented solely by notes and memoranda, he selected three documents as of peculiar importance, and one of them the Flassan Memoir. That consequently the Memoir is

authentic, and was one of the documents designed by d'Argenson as the basis of the unedited "Mémoires du Ministère," Vol. I. Arts. 5–12, or Vol. II. It was turned over, but not published, by M. Rathery, who could not, of course, have realised its critical importance.

The last piece of evidence remains.

(ix.) This Memoir, with the rest of d'Argenson's manuscripts, perished in the burning of the Library of the Louvre in 1871. It follows that neither M. de Broglie (who wrote in 1888 "Marie Thérèse") nor M. Zevort (in 1879) would have expected to find it if they had known where it might have been found.

M. de Broglie protests that, even if authentic, it is at least unimportant, as it is not mentioned by d'Argenson in his published memoirs. To this we reply—

(i.) That it could not have been, as the memoirs during the period into which it would have fallen ("au mois de février" —Flassan) have been neither edited nor published.

(ii.) That a memoir of an exactly similar character is categorically mentioned by d'Argenson as having been presented by him to the king a few weeks before (*cf.* "Mémoires du Ministère" [Rathery], IV. p. 257, and this essay, p. 104).

(iii.) That unless the policy set forth in this memoir had a very real existence, much of the "Mémoires du Ministère," I. Art. 4, and many scattered references to be found elsewhere, are simply unintelligible.

The question is important; for if this memoir is authentic, it follows that the history of d'Argenson's ministry during th e year 1745 has yet to be written.

B.

THE TEXTS OF THE "CONSIDÉRATIONS."

Since this essay was written, the two editions of 1764 and 1784 have been carefully collated, with the object of clearing up the obscurity which surrounds them. The conclusions are as follows:—

A. The text of 1764 was completed some years before d'Argenson's accession to the ministry, and is based upon a genuine manuscript, probably as early as those of 1737.

B. The text of 1784, the whole of which is subsequent to his retirement from the ministry, divides into two parts.

(*a*) Chapters I.—VI., and VIII. These chapters represent a part of the original work as revised and enlarged by the author. The "plan," however, which they are designed to elucidate disappears from the edition, and is replaced (Chapter VII.) by a much vaster project with which they are not concerned. The date of this revision is probably about 1750, and it may be placed generally from 1748 to 1752.

(*b*) Chapters VII., IX., and Conclusion. Chapter VII. contains the second of d'Argenson's "plans." Chapter IX. and the Conclusion represent the Chapter VIII., articles 2 and 3, of 1764, re-written with a view to the second plan. To that "plan" they are pointedly directed, and they have neither the same date nor the same intention as the rest of the edition. The date of the second plan and of the second fragmentary revision is probably about 1755.

The evidence for the suggested dates must be succinctly given.

(*a*) Chapters I.–VI. and VIII. It is here purely internal, *e.g.*:—

35 (1784) *cf.* 37 (1764). "tel s'imagine," &c.
40 ,, *cf.* 42, ,, Corruption in England.
42, 45 ,, *cf.* 43, 47, ,, Omission of "les circonstances présentes" and "sous le présent règne," pointing to date later than 1751.
49 ,, *cf.* 52, ,, Venice: "elle est revenue de ses erreurs."
63 ,, *cf.* 69, ,, "The House of Nassau," pointing to date as early as 1748.
64 ,, *cf.* 70, ,, Change of tone regarding Switzerland.
90 ,, *cf.* 104, ,, "Le roi de Prusse."
101–16 ,, Addition of two chapters on Paraguay and China.
153 ,, Appearance of proposal to sell Crown lands.
161 ,, *cf.* 173 (1764): "gemissants sans faire aucuns efforts."
164 ,, *cf.* 176, ,, Amplification of remarks on Councils.
168 ,, *cf.* 182, ,, Fleury's ministry.
173 ,, *cf.* 188, ,, "Les souverains commencent."
(1784) 265 note, "More than thirty years."

Sometimes the strongest evidence consists in slight touches of expression, *e.g.*:—

93 (1784) *cf.* 107 (1764): "les vertus sociales" for "des manières polies."
104 (1784) "l'Être Suprême, auteur du Droit Naturel."
163 (1784) *cf.* 175 (1764): "en morale et en philosophie" for "en morale et en politesse."
172 ,, *cf.* 187 ,, "on se pique de générosité."

This evidence proves conclusively that a considerable period must have elapsed between the composition of the texts, a period extending beyond the close of d'Argenson's ministry. The revised version can scarcely be earlier than 1748 and scarcely later than 1752. It is separated from the original by ten to fifteen years.

(*b*) Chapters VII., IX., and Conclusion. These chapters are immeasurably in advance of the rest of the work, and represent a complete revolution of ideas. We know, on the witness of his invaluable Journal, that about the year 1753 such a revolution took place in d'Argenson's mind; and that any time between 1753 and his death in 1757 such ideas were possible and natural to him [see this essay, Chapter V.]. This portion of the work may be placed approximately about the year 1755.

C.

D'ARGENSON'S VIEWS ON PUBLIC QUESTIONS PRIOR TO HIS ACCESSION TO THE MINISTRY.

("*Journal et Mémoires*," Rathery, I.–IV.)

See for—

A. *The action of France with regard to the commercial rivalry between Spain and England.*—I. 325, 328; II. 303, 330, 382, 390; III. 39, 43, 44, 45, 46, 50–1, 55, 59, 83, 145, 164, 170, 217, 245, 312, 318, 319, 419, 435–38; IV. 14, 19, 36.

B. *The question of the Imperial Succession.*—I. 304–5, 323, 330; III. 208 (death of Emperor), 208–11, 215, 216, 218, 221, 229, 230, 238, 239, 240, 245, 246, 249, 253, 260, 266, 268, 274, 276, 278, 279, 285, 290–91, 295, 296, 299, 300, 303–5, 309, 310, 317, 322, 327, 328, 342, 342–3, 344, 346, 350, 354, 356, 367, 375, 378, 384, 394, 396; IV. 13, 15, 51, 81, 82, 85, 86, 95.

C. *The State of the Interior.*—I. 342; II. 72, 148–49, 158–59, 165, 194, 218; III. 84, 92, 96, 97, 100, 131, 167, 169, 170–71, 173, 178, 205, 207, 213, 215, 222, 224, 280, 287, 310, 312, 363, 371, 380, 401–2, 403, 417, 418, 423, 434; IV. 69, 76, 83, 107–9.

D. *The Character of Louis XV.*—I. 290, 335; II. 273; III. 81, 111, 124, 133, 138, 147, 148, 179, 182–84, 189, 192, 226, 243, 245, 257, 264, 265, 275, 308, 369, 370, 386, 387, 391, 393, 405, 409, 412, 413, 414, 415, 421, 424, 429, 430; IV. 47, 51, 52, 60, 68, 101, 103.

E. *Frederick of Prussia.*—III. 28, 105, 108, 109, 112, 138, 143, 153, 240, 249, 250, 290–91, 294, 299, 317, 378, 383, 395; IV. 13, 56.

D.

INDEX TO THE GREAT PUBLIC QUESTIONS NOTICED IN THE LAST FIVE VOLUMES OF D'ARGENSON'S JOURNAL.

The volumes V.–IX. embrace the period 1746–56.

A. *D'Argenson's views on the conduct of French policy at home and abroad.*—V. 102, 119, 123, 138, 276, 301, 361, 409, 413, 425, 441, 443, 472; VI. 46, 49, 51, 114, 136, 159, 181, 197, 200, 209, 245, 252, 256, 268, 271, 288, 296, 305, 314, 317, 327, 336, 359, 383, 424, 425, 451; VII. 79, 81, 102, 118, 144, 232, 284, 299, 332, 370, 387, 391, 404, 434; VIII. 8, 37, 166, 220, 299, 324, 339, 357, 478; IX. 74, 111, 112, 300.

B. *The Political Opposition.*—V. 138, 142, 227, 230, 238, 250, 268, 278, 339, 343, 346, 352, 356, 365, 369, 372, 380, 384, 402, 404, 409–11, 415–16, 425, 433, 444, 454; VI. 10, 11, 15, 24, 39, 61, 151, 172, 174, 183, 191, 211–12, 213–16, 217, 219, 228, 240, 243, 257, 258–59, 265, 277, 318, 319–20, 330, 403, 425, 450, 452, 458, 464; VII. 23, 86, 199, 233, 243, 266, 284, 294, 296, 330, 339, 342, 369, 374, 379, 394, 448, 450, 464; VIII. 11, 16, 19, 20, 21, 22, 25, 33, 35, 55, 72, 80, 110, 113, 116, 124, 126, 152, 153, 160, 162, 176, 189, 203, 222, 248, 265, 272, 302, 309, 313, 315, 344, 365, 397, 445, 452; IX. 9, 48, 112, 221, 227, 247, 294, 334, 336, 361, 366, 368, 370, 376, 377.

C. *The "Philosophical" Opposition.*—VI. 10, 26, 34, 81, 209, 249, 310, 353, 390, 464; VII. 47, 51, 56–7, 58, 63, 68, 71, 95, 97, 106, 110, 112, 123, 130, 224, 242, 294–95, 309, 419, 424, 457, 464; VIII. 3, 18, 35, 43, 57, 60, 64, 66, 95, 141, 202, 289, 333, 372, 386, 439; IX. 7, 22, 182, 220.

D. *Relations with Prussia. Change in alliances.*—V. 141,

210, 251, 252; VI. 302, 338; VII. 50, 79, 302; VIII. 62, 164; IX. 61, 136, 180–81, 185, 278–79, 280–82, 284, 289, 312, 324–25, 328, 356.

E. *Relations with England.*—V. 90, 91, 138, 428; VI. 46, 68, 97, 153, 171, 301, 335, 344, 346, 354, 464, 473; VII. 15, 31, 54, 98, 140, 287, 388, 397, 401; VIII. 73, 83, 100, 110, 188, 196, 348, 400, 450, 452, 460, 467, 476; IX. 16, 28, 33, 93, 100, 107, 117, 145, 168, 178, 229, 235, 239, 253, 260, 273, 300.

NOTES.

NOTES.

1–8

[1] Despite d'Argenson's distinguished place among the worthies of his time, the literature relating to him is singularly meagre. Apart from his own works, it consists entirely of—

(*a*) Brief introductions to the two editions of his Journal.

(*b*) A few literary notices of the Journal by M. Scherer ("Études," III.), and Sainte Beuve ("Causeries du lundi," XII. and XIV.); and an admirable review by M. Aubertin in the "Esprit Public."

(*c*) Incidental notices in the more general works which deal with d'Argenson's ministry. The most important are those by M. le duc de Broglie and M. Zevort.

[2] Fontenelle, "Éloge de Marc René d'Argenson," Oeuvres (1818), I. p. 311.

[3] In a letter dated from Amiens, June 7, 1646. "Lettres de Mazarin" Cheruel, Imprimerie Nationale, 1889).

[4] "Je suis bien ayse de la constance des Catalans. J'attribue en partie cela à la prudence et à l'adresse avec laquelle vous les sçavez gouverner" (Letter of July 16, 1643). In another of September 4th, in the same year, Mazarin speaks to him of "la reconnaissance que vos services méritent." Mazarin was not the first great minister whose appreciation d'Argenson won. There exists a letter of Richelieu, such as is only written to a man upon whose regard one can lean and upon whose strength one can rely. (Tarascon, July 30, 1632.) (Alfred Barbier, "Notice Biographique sur René de Voyer d'Argenson." Poitiers, 1885. [Bibliothèque Nationale.])

[5] He was taken prisoner at Milan, and ransomed for ten thousand crowns. Alfred Barbier, "Notice Biographique." Barbier's date is 1639.

[6] See "Biographie Universelle," V. 44, and "Notice Biographique" above.

[7] "Biographie Universelle," ibid.

[8] His name, by decree of the Senate, was inscribed in the Book of Gold,

9–39

and he was authorised to add to his escutcheon the arms of Venice. Henceforth the arms of d'Argenson bear the lion of St. Mark. See Daru, "Histoire de Venise," XXXIII., p. 16, and Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, MS. 4161 "Généalogie de M. le Marquis d'Argenson."

9 D'Argenson, Journal (Rathery), I. p. 2.

10 Journal (Rathery), I. p. 2. "Il paraissait se complaire à être maltraité."

11 Journal (Rathery), I. p. 2.

12 M. Hippolyte de Laporte, "Biographie Universelle," V. 44.

13 D'Argenson himself said of him: "Je compte que son petit-fils ne démérite pas, ayant tourné son zèle à la dévotion à l'état et à sa chère patrie" (Journal, Rathery, I. p. 3, note).

14 Journal (Rathery), I. p. 8, *cf.* St. Simon, "Mémoires," XIV. p. 316.

15 Journal (Rathery), I. p. 7, *cf.* St. Simon, XIV. p. 315.

16 Ibid, I. p. 6.

17 Fontenelle, "Éloge de Marc René d'Argenson," Oeuvres, I. p. 314. "L'âme, toujours agissante et presque inconnue, de ce grand corps."

18 Fontenelle, "Éloge," I. p. 315.

19 St. Simon, VII. p. 71; and Fontenelle, ibid.

20 St. Simon, VII. p. 143, *cf.* Marais, "Journal," I. p. 287.

21 "Du 21 mai, 1717, 10 heures du matin. François Marie Arouet, âgé de vingt-deux ans, ayant aucune profession." Procés-verbal at the Bastille, see Voltaire, Édition Garnier, I. p. 299; and Buvat, "Journal," I. p. 514.

22 Buvat, I. p. 517.

23 Oeuvres, I. p. 315.

24 St. Simon, XIV. p. 368.

25 Fontenelle, I. p. 318.

26 St. Simon, XIV. p. 369.

27 Ibid., XIV. p. 368.

28 Ibid., XIV. p. 315.

29 Journal (Rathery), I. p. 7.

0 St. Simon, XVII. p. 102; XVI. p. 369; *cf.* Marais, I. p. 272.

31 He was the real creator of the administration, which St. Simon says he managed "d'une manière transcendante," XIV. 314.

32 "Une figure effrayante qui retraçoit celle des trois juges des enfers" (St. Simon, XIV. p. 315).

33 "Au milieu des fonctions pénibles, l'humanité trouvoit aisément grâce devant lui" (St. Simon, ibid.),

34 Fontenelle, Oeuvres, I. pp. 314–15.

35 Martin, "Histoire de France," XV. p. 40: St. Simon, XIV. pp. 316, 317.

36 St. Simon, XVI. p. 48. "Quand tout fut posé et rassis, le garde des sceaux demeura quelques minutes dans sa chaire, immobile, regardant au dessous, et ce feu d'esprit qui lui sortoit des yeux sembloit percer toutes les poitrines." It is one of St. Simon's finest episodes.

37 "Le roi veut être obéi, et obéi sur-le-champ" (St. Simon, XVI p. 51).

38 Fontenelle, "Éloge," I. p. 316.

39 Ibid., I. p. 317.

40 See Buvat, I. p. 312; *cf.* I. p. 318, where the Regent speaks of him as "un tartufe et un insolent."

41 Martin, "Histoire de France," XV. pp. 61, 62.

42 Marais, "Journal," I. p. 283.

43 Ibid., II. p. 148.

44 It was drawn more briefly by the rude daring of the "esprit gaulois." Among the caricatures which accompanied his fall, we find—

"*Sixty thousand livres reward!*

Lost, between the Rue St. Antoine and the Palais Royal or the Palais des Tuileries an old black dog with a red collar" (the cordon rouge of the order of St. Louis), "who was to be seen about the neighbourhood. Anyone returning the same will receive the above reward. Apply the Abbey of La Madeleine de Traisnel, in the Faubourg St. Antoine" (Buvat, II. p. 102: *cf.* Marais, I. p. 320).

45 St. Simon, XVII. p. 102.

46 "Le ministère gêné et passager:" Voltaire, "Siècle de Louis XIV.,' Édit. Garnier, XIV. p. 503.

47 Marais, II. p. 128.

48 Journal (Rathery), I. p. 23.

49 It is a little perplexing to find this incident related under date 1718. It is clear from the tone of the passage that d'Argenson is little more than a boy, without ordinary official experience, and by no means a man of twenty four, on the eve of receiving an Intendancy. Suspicions of the date are confirmed by the fact that for only twenty-seven days of the year 1718 was his father Chief of Police at all. The incident probably occurred some time between 1712, when he appears to have left school, and 1716, when his public career began. A mistake of the kind might naturally arise, as the earlier part of the Journal was not written until long after the events recorded—probably about 1730.

50 Journal (Rathery), I. p. 18.

51 His mother's ideas in this matter seem to have followed the liberality of the prevailing fashion. In an unsigned letter to Madame d'Argenson's sister, the Marquise de Balleroy, we come across the following passage:

"Il vient d'y avoir un grand changement entre plusieurs nobles dames et messieurs, tant de la ville que de la cour. . . . Madame d'Argenson, vacante par la mort du chevalier d'Oppède, a choisi pour consolation le marquis d'Alleurs, jeune homme d'une discrétion au-dessus de son âge" (December 27, 1717). As we have seen, her husband did not go comfortless. See p. 16.

52 Journal (Rathery), I. p. 15.

53 A number of d'Argenson's early drawings are preserved in the Library of the Arsenal (MS. 6164). They are distinguished chiefly by care of execution, and a natural loyalty to the ancestral domain. They consist principally of views of the family seats in Touraine

54 Journal (Rathery), I. p. 16.

55 Ibid., I. p. 17

56–80

56 Émond, "Histoire du Collège Louis-le-Grand."

57 "Des gens du monde à bonnes fortunes" (Journal, Rathery, I. p. 17).

58 Ibid., I. p. 17.

59 Ibid., I. p. 17. The metaphor is of d'Argenson's compounding.

60 The man who is known to history for having reviled the young Voltaire, ow one of d'Argenson's schoolfellows, as the future coryphæus of deism in France.

61 We are indebted to St. Simon for this explanation of the young d'Argensons' escape. See "Mémoires," XIII. pp. 213, 214. The incident aptly illustrates the mysterious power which the Chief of Police exercised.

62 "Je me trouvais trop sot de n'en avoir profité, et j'en ai eu depuis de longs repentirs" (Journal, Rathery, I. p. 19).

63 "L'épopée royale" (Arsène Houssaye, "La Régence," p. 4).

64 See Martin, "Histoire de France," XIV. pp. 366–617.

65 See p. 15; St. Simon's "Mémoires," VII. p. 71; and Fontenelle, I. p. 315.

66 With this, the most famous society of the time, d'Argenson was only remotely connected. He tells us ["Loisirs d'un Ministre," I. p. 187 (1785], that he had met and talked with Chaulieu occasionally at the Duchesse de Maine's, whither the "Anacreon of the Temple" was attracted by his passion for the famous Mdlle. de Launay.

67 *E.g.*, Journal (Rathery), I. p. 186.

68 Ibid., I. p. 6, *cf.* p. 16.

69 See p. 17., *cf.* Journal (Rathery), I. p. 42.

70 See p. 16., *cf.* St. Simon, XIV. p. 315.

71 We are continually sensible of the sulphurous atmosphere through which Marc René d'Argenson is seen in contemporary memoirs.

72 *E.g.*, one which crops up incidentally in a letter of the Marquis de Balleroy, July 26, 1722. "Effectivement tout le monde dit qu'il fait son intendance à merveille, et mieux que bien des gens qui ont l'esprit plus brillant que lui" (Barthélemy, II. p. 270). *Cf.* also a letter of St. Pierre to d'Argenson, quoted p. 41.

73 The father of the famous Controller-General.

74 Journal (Rathery), I. p. 125.

75 The edition here cited is that of Count Édouard de Barthélemy, lately published in two volumes. The edition consists of a series of extracts from certain of the letters, and represents only a fraction of the whole correspondence, which occupies eight volumes. (Bibliothèque Mazarine, MS. 2341).

76 See Lacroix, "xviii. Siècle—Le Libraire."

77 The great "Constitution Unigenitus," which served as a rallying cry for the rival factions for half a century.

78 Martin, "Histoire de France," XV. p. 109.

79 St. Simon speaks of Marc René d'Argenson's efforts to break the weight of the religious persecution; and the modest expression of gratitude which closes Fontenelle's "Éloge" was evoked by the protection d'Argenson had given him in the storm which gathered round the "Histoire des Oracles."

80 Marais, "Journal," I. p. 287. "A la vérité, il disait, et c'est à moi-

même qu'il l'a dit, que les jésuites étaient des fripons aussi, et qu'il avait la preuve de l'un et de l'autre."

81 Barthélemy, I. p. 141.

82 Martin, "Histoire de France, XV. p. 40.

83 Barthélemy, I. p. 208.

84 Martin, "Histoire de France," XV. p. 65.

85 *Cf.* Aubertin, "L'esprit public," chap. iii.

86 *Cf.* Journal (Rathery), I. 123.

87 Journal (Rathery), I. 23.

88 See p. 18.

89 See pp. 71–3.

90 November 12, 1719. Barthélemy, II. p. 83.

91 Martin, "Histoire de France," XV. 55.

92 Ibid., XV. p. 56.

93 Buvat, "Journal," II. p. 35.

94 D'Argenson became Master of Requests on his marriage with Mademoiselle Méliand, who brought him the position as part of her dowry. See Journal (Rathery), IV. p. 29.

95 Barthélemy, II. p. 130.

96 St. Simon, "Mémoires," XVI. p. 435. "On n'avait jamais ouï parler d'un conseiller d'état et intendant de Hainaut de vingt-quatre ans; ni d'un lieutenant de police encore plus jeune." D'Argenson, as a matter of fact, was twenty-six.

97 D'Argenson's first notice of his Intendancy is dated April (Journal, Rathery, I. p. 35). We have however a letter written by him to Madame de Balleroy from Valenciennes on March 22nd. He says so little as to suggest that he had just arrived, and had little pleasant to say. On April 7th he writes the charming letter, part of which is quoted below.

98 See Martin, "Histoire de France," XV. p. 64. In a witty satire upon the System which appeared upon the walls at this period, we read: "Jean Law, médecin empirique, directeur des hôpitaux; d'Argenson, chirugeon-major" (Arsène Houssaye, "La Régence").

99 Journal (Rathery), I. p. 43, and note. See also Buvat, II. p. 195.

100 The translation here is from d'Argenson's handwriting (Bibliothèque Mazarine, MS. 2341, V. fol. 130). The passage is rendered by Barthélemy (II. p. 153): "Un très joli lansquenet, *un bon* picquet, quadrille et même brélan." The manuscript has: "Nous avons un très joli lansquenet, *ombre*, picquet, *cela ne manque en province*, quadrille et meme brélan." It is without stops, but otherwise there is no difficulty.

101 Letters are addressed to her at her château "near Bayeux."

102 See Aubertin, "L'esprit public," chap. iv.

103 The Chevalier's letters are sufficiently amusing, but not sufficiently frequent. He has sometimes to apologise for remissness on the old ground of lack of news.

104 Barthélemy, I. p. 257.

105 "La proposition n'est peut-être pas encore bien mesurée" (Barthélemy, I. p. 256). The word is more probably "proportion."

106–33

106 Barthélemy, II. p. 475.

107 Ibid., II. p. 475.

108 For a sketch of the Caumartin character, see Aubertin, "L'esprit public," chap. iv.

109 For a slight reflection of the feeling with regard to him, see Marais, "Mémoires," I. p. 308.

110 Barthélemy, I. pp. 110, 111.

111 Louis XIV. was dead, and his ministers were deserted.

112 Journal (Rathery), I. p. 66.

113 Édouard Goumy, "L'Abbé de St. Pierre," p. 50.

114 D'Argenson, Journal (Édition Jannet), IV. p. 341.

115 A remark of Marais ("Mémoires," III. p. 74) in expressing surprise at d'Argenson's resignation: "On dit que c'est volontairement, et qu'il aime mieux se reposer au conseil à trente ans, que de régir cet intendance, plus militaire que de justice et de finance."

116 Journal (Rathery), I. p. 35.

117 Ibid., I. 36.

118 Ibid.

119 Buvat, "Journal," II. p. 421.

120 Journal (Rathery), I. p. 45.

121 *Cf.* a very significant remark of the Marquis de Balleroy in a letter of July 26, 1722. See note 72.

122 See p. 33.

123 Journal (Rathery), IV. p. 30.

124 Journal (Rathery), IV. pp. 28, 29. *Cf.* also Caumartin de Boissy's letters of May 12 and 14, 1721. (Barthélemy, II. pp. 328, 329.) See also Marais, II. p. 147.

125 Journal (Rathery), I. p. 58.

126 Ibid., I. pp. 55–61.

127 The word is d'Argenson's, and characteristic of him.

128 Journal (Rathery), I. p. 57.

129 Ibid., I. p. 49.

130 Ibid., I. p. 58.

131 Count d'Argenson had become chief of police in succession to Machault in the spring of 1720. In June he was involved in his father's disgrace: see p. 34. Shortly afterwards he received the Intendancy of Touraine, and only returned to Paris in the early part of 1722, when he resumed the direction of the police. In the autumn of 1723, he became chancellor of the Orléans household, and held that position at the Regent's death in December. His dismissal from the police followed a few weeks afterwards: see below (Marais, "Journal," III. p. 73). Before the end of January 1724, through the influence of the young Duke of Orléans, he was provided with a seat at the Council of State.

132 Mentioned by d'Argenson in the course of the letter of January 4 quoted below. *Cf.* Marais, "Journal," III. p. 77, and Barbier.

133 Journal (Rathery), I. p. 59.

134 Marais, "Journal," III. p. 73.

135 Journal (Rathery), I p. 59.

136 Ibid., I. p. 63

137 Ibid., I. p. 60.

138 Ibid., I. pp. 64–67

139 Ibid., I. p 44.

140 Ibid., I. pp. 67–70

141 Ibid., I. p. 53.

142 Ibid., I. p. 54.

143 "L'esprit public au XVIII. siècle," p. 197. See also par. p. 200.

144 As d'Argenson himself admits ("Essais," II. pp. 84, 85).

145 "Essais dans le goût de ceux de Montagne," (Montaigne) II. p. 84 (1785).

146 Ibid., II. p. 86.

147 These papers, after a chequered career, fell into the hands of the Abbé d'Olivet, Voltaire's correspondent, who published a selection of them as "Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de Louis XIV., par le feu M. l'Abbé de Choisy, de l'Académie Française" ("Essais," II. p. 86).

148 The essay in which he refers to it was written some years after the suppression of the Entresol.

149 "Essais," II. p. 103 (1785). The meetings were held every Tuesday. The tone prevailing in the little coterie is suggested by the amusing criticism of Perrault's poem, "On the Creation of the World:" see "Essais," II. p. 105.

150 "Lettres de Henry St. John" (Grimoard), III. p. 198. In another letter of October 6th, he asks to be remembered to "our little society" (III. p. 206). The letters are in French.

151 Journal (Rathery), I. p. 91.

152 Ibid., I. p. 102. "Je demandai de moi-même à admettre l'abbé."

153 Journal (Édition Jannet), I. p. 67.

154 This account of the Entresol is derived from d'Argenson's Journal (Rathery), I. pp. 91–111; "Essais dans le goût de ceux de Montagne, ou Loisirs d'un Ministre," *passim*; "Lettres de Henry St. John," edited by Grimoard, 1808: see Appendix, III. p. 459. There is also a conscientious account in a paper by M. Tessin, "Un membre de l'Entresol" (Bibliothèque Nationale).

155 Journal (Rathery), I. p. 96.

156 Grimoard, III. p. 466, and Journal (Rathery), I. p. 97.

157 Grimoard, III. p. 473.

158 Journal (Rathery), VI. p. 168. "J'eus au conseil le bureau des affaires ecclésiastiques," &c.

159 See below, note 399.

160 "Loisirs d'un Ministre," II. pp. 180, 181.

161 Journal (Ratherey), I. p. 99.

162 Ibid., I. p. 104.

163 "Le Comte de Plélo" (J. B. Rathery), p. 101

164 Ibid.

165 Ibid., p. 102.

166-96

166 Journal (Rathery), I. p. 103. "Son Éminence montrait un grand goût pour l'Entresol."

167 Ibid.

168 Ibid.

169 Ibid.

170 Ibid., I. p. 107.

171 Ibid., I. p. 110.

172 "Lettres de Henry St. John" (Grimoard), III. p. 478

173 Journal (Rathery), I. p. 72.

174 Ibid., Introduction, I. p. xvii.

175 During the Commune, May 23.

176 Édouard Goumy, "L'Abbé de St. Pierre," p. 56.

177 Journal (Rathery), I. p. 115.

178 See p. 57. Journal (Rathery), VI. p. 168.

179 Martin, "Histoire de France," XV. p. 166.

180 Journal (Rathery), I. p. 118. July, 1732,

181 Ibid. I. p. 117.

182 Goumy, "L'Abbé de St. Pierre," p. 57.

183 Martin, "Histoire de France," XV. p. 166.

184 Journal (Rathery), I. p. 123, August, 1732. It might be contended that the proposal was never serious. The contention would be just if the offer had been made a year afterwards; but at this time the impression produced by d'Argenson was still fresh, and Chauvelin's sincerity is above reproach.

185 See pp. 28–9.

186 Journal (Rathery), I. p. 123.

187 Ibid., I. p. 120.

188 Ibid., I. p. 131.

189 Chauvelin placed his library at his disposal, gave him valuable hints as to the manner in which to pay court to the Cardinal, and even deigned to instruct him in the etiquette of card-playing, one of the necessary arts of Court life. "In fact," says d'Argenson himself, "there is no denying that this first minister neglects no opportunity of drawing me out and bringing me into prominence; and that, if I myself were not concerned, I might say that one should think well of him for helping in this way a zealous and unobtrusive man, who tries to be of use without knowledge of the brazen art of pushing himself forward" (Journal, Rathery, I. p. 140).

190 Ibid., I. p. 137.

191 Goumy, "L'Abbé de St. Pierre," p. 60. In reference to another memoir, relating to a method of procuring cavalry horses, St. Pierre writes: "I shall not preach to you the necessity of enthusiasm in undertaking—you have quite enough,—but assiduous work in order to perfect" (Goumy, p. 59).

192 Journal (Rathery), I. p. 184.

193 Ibid., I. p. 205.

194 Ibid., I. p. 206.

195 Ibid., I. p. 207.

196 Ibid., I. pp. 207–9.

197 See his mournful complaint to Chauvelin (Ibid., I. p. 141).

198 This was the real nature of the "divorce" he speaks of. See below, note 207.

199 On November 31. See the Marquis de Balleroy's letters of November 31 and December 1, where a circumstantial account is given of the ceremony (Barthélemy, I. pp. 378, 379). *Cf.* pp. 33, 43, 47, 71–73. Notes 94, 202, 207.

200 A copy of the contract, a purely business document, exists in the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal (MS. 6115).

201 See the Marquis de Balleroy's letter of November 22, 1718 (Barthélemy, I. p. 373).

202 See especially that of December 8, 1718. It is sufficiently amusing to quote in the original. "J'ai eu grand soin, ma chère tante, d'inspirer à Madame d'Argenson tous les sentiments qui vous sont dus. Pardonnez si ce qu'exigent votre mérite et votre esprit n'a moins arrêté que les bontés et l'amitié que vous avez pour moi. J'espère que vous ferez par la suite autant de cas de son amitié que de son admiration, et je vous assure que je l'élèverai à être tout ce qu'il y aura de plus respectueux dans votre népotisme. Me voilà-t-il pas bientôt assez à parler en mari fort supérieur d'âge? Je me trouve respectable par près de dix années de cette supériorité ; je ne m'y serois pas attendu en me mariant aussi jeune." (He was now twenty-four.) "Je vois l'approbation de tout le monde qui me parle naturellement sur ce mariage, bien conforme à la vôtre. Je vous assure que je suis fort éloigné du repentir," &c. (Barthélemy, I. p. 385).

203 Journal (Rathery), I. p. 180. See p. 43 and note 228.

204 Ibid., I. pp. 180, 181. "La femme la plus avare de Paris." "La séquestration de bonne compagnie, même de toute compagnie."

205 Ibid., I. p. 181.

206 Ibid., I. p. 182.

207 In the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal (Ms. 6141, fol. 295) there exists a "Counsel's opinion" obtained by Mme. d'Argenson, signed "De Lambon," and dated September 28, 1756. It throws much light upon Madame d'Argenson's character, and confirms her husband's estimate of her. After twenty-two years she had not forgiven; and feeling it an indignity to be dependent upon her husband for the handsome allowance he had consented to make her, she proposed to have the separation, both of person and property, judicially confirmed. Her counsel evidently thought her claim unwarrantable, and in some of his most moderate words he says: "But to-day, after more than twenty-two years that they have lived apart, and after the legal arrangements made by Madame d'Argenson with her husband in January, 1733, and October, 1747 (le . . . ? janvier, 1733, et le ? octobre, 1747), her desire would not be countenanced for a moment. She would not be permitted to revive the old facts, and to form a demand for a (judicial) separation, so long as M. d'Argenson adheres faithfully to that concluded by agreement." The document closes with the crushing words: "Il vaut mieux se condamner soimême, que de plaider pour être condamné."

208 Journal (Rathery), I. p. 215.

209–38

209 Journal (Rathery), I. p. 219.

210 Ibid., September 3, and November 13 and 26, 1736.

211 Ibid., I. p. 228.

212 See Journal (Rathery), III. p. 13, and De Tocqueville, "Histoire Philosophique du règne de Louis XV.," I. p. 416.

213 Journal (Rathery), I. p. 235.

214 Ibid., I. p. 237.

215 Ibid., I. p. 238.

216 Ibid., I. p. 242.

217 D'Argenson had held the same post in the beginning of his career (see pp. 28, 30). It was not important, but it presented opportunities which Count d'Argenson was astute enough to turn to account. He held it in conjunction with the chancellorship of the Orléans household, which had been given him by the Regent in 1723, and which he retained after his dismissal from the Lieutenancy of Police in January, 1724. See p. 46.

218 Journal (Rathery), I. p. 246.

219 Ibid., I. p. 260.

220 Ibid., I. p. 262.

221 Ibid., I. p. 263.

222 Ibid., I. p. 262.

223 Ste. Beuve, "Causeries du lundi," XII. and XIV.

224 Journal (Rathery), I. pp. 240–41.

225 Ibid., I. p. 260.

226 At this time Portugal, completely dominated by English influence, was a thorn in the side of the Bourbon powers. *Cf.* "Considérations," p. 89 (1764) and p. 78 (1784).

227 Journal (Rathery), I. p. 264.

228 See pp. 43, 72. *Cf.* also Journal (Rathery), I. p. 208, where he speaks of himself as the poorest man in the Council. We know that in preparing for this embassy, d'Argenson spent considerable sums (*cf.* Journal, Rathery, IV. p. 31), and that the primary cause of his delay in setting out was the refusal of Fleury to indemnify him. See Journal (Rathery), I. p. 310: see also Journal (édit. Jannet), IV. p. 348.

229 Journal (Rathery), I. p. 268.

230 Ibid., I. p. 284.

231 Ibid., I. p. 291.

232 Ibid., I. p. 301.

233 *Cf.* p. 79. "We should be happy——."

234 Journal (Rathery), II. p. 35.

235 Ibid., II. p. 73.

236 Ibid., II. p. 107. March 10, 1739.

237 Journal (Rathery), II. p. 185. 1 July, 1739. It was on this very day that d'Argenson received an order from Amelot, the Foreign Minister, to dismiss the train which he had engaged for the Portuguese embassy; and it is evident that his forbearance breaks down at last.

238 Ibid., II. p. 142.

239 The Journal at this period is one long and often luminous survey of the events of the time. In Appendix C. reference is given to the more important passages under the several departments to which they refer.

240 For a brief and intelligible account of the Court opposition to Fleury, see De Tocqueville, "Histoire Philosophique du règne de Louis XV.," I. pp. 416–20.

241 See p. 74.

242 At the Collège Louis-le-Grand: see pp. 24, 25. We may gather from a letter from d'Argenson to Voltaire (June 20, 1739. Nisard) that some of Voltaire's school squibs had found a refuge among the papers of his "camarade."

243 On Voltaire's connection with this circle, see d'Argenson, "Essais dans le goût de ceux de Montagne," I. p. 187 (1785).

244 May, 1726. (Morley, "Voltaire," p. 44.)

245 The baroness de la Fontaine-Martel. See Journal (Rathery), I. p. 147, and Voltaire's "Correspondance," *passim*.

246 A person called Desfontaines, not unknown at that date.

247 For particulars of d'Argenson's share in the incident, see Voltaire, "Oeuvres" (Édition Garnier XXXV.). Letters of 7th and 24th March, 16th April, 2nd May, 4th and 21st June. D'Argenson's letters of 7th February (Garnier), 20th June, and 7th July (Charles Nisard, "Mémoires et Correspondance"). See also letters of Madame du Châtelet of about the same date.

248 D'Argenson's letter of 20th June. This letter appears in none of the editions of Voltaire. It was published, with another of 7th July, by Charles Nisard ("Mémoires et Correspondance inédits 1726–1816,"), and was found by him among the papers of Suard.

249 March 24, 1739. In a letter to d'Argenson of January 26, 1740, Voltaire speaks of those views upon history of which he afterwards became the apostle. (*Cf.* Morley, "Voltaire," p. 298). "Another idea of mine. We have only had the history of kings, and that of the nation has not been written. It would seem that for fourteen hundred years we have had nothing in Gaul but kings, ministers, and generals; our manners, laws, customs, ideas, are they then nothing?"

This letter closes with the postscript: "Pardon; there was a great figure in optics on the other leaf; I have torn it off."

250 May 8, 1739. Édition Garnier XXXV. pp. 272–3. The idea of d'Argenson as Frederick's first minister occurs not unfrequently in future letters.

251 Ibid., 289–292.

252 July 28, 1739. For further details see letters of 8th May, 21st June, and 28th July, and d'Argenson, 7th July.

253 For references to the Portuguese embassy, see letters of 16th April, 28th July, and 17th August; and d'Argenson, 20th June (Nisard).

254 See Note 420.

255 Voltaire, 16th April, 1739. It may be presumed that d'Argenson was

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unable to keep his satisfaction to himself; for Voltaire writes to his business agent in Paris, asking him to call upon d'Argenson and thank him for the care he had taken of the letters, as a gentle suggestion that he should take more of it in future. See Voltaire to Moussinot, 30th May, 1740 (Édit. Garnier, XXXV. p. 440).

256 Journal (Rathery) III. p. 105.

257 Journal (Rathery), III. p. 247.

258 Ibid., IV. p. 96.

259 De Broglie, "Marie Thérèse, Impératrice" (for 1745), and "Maurice de Saxe et le Marquis d'Argenson" (for 1746): Zevort, "Le Marquis d'Argenson et le Ministère des affaires étrangères, 1744–47."

260 "Considérations sur le gouvernement de la France," d'Argenson's famous treatise upon French politics, which is examined in Chapter VI.

261 "But in stirring the fire we must be careful not to set it in a blaze. This nation (the English) is awakened promptly and powerfully by the pressure of necessity; all parties unite: and in spite of the public debt, the wealth in private hands is a fund of great resources" (p. 325). After recommending preparation for a great maritime war, he proceeds, "If we succeed, the flourishing English colonies will dwindle to nothing" (p. 326, "Considérations," edit. 1764–5).

262 "Autre Traité des Principaux Interêts de la France avec ses voisins à l'occasion du projet d'un tribunal Européen par M. l'Abbé de St. Pierre, Novembre, 1737." See the four manuscripts, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal. This superscription does not appear in the printed editions.

263 Journal (Rathery), III. p. 259.

264 Zevort, p. 5.

265 See Appendix C.

266 M. de Broglie speaks of d'Argenson as having been "among the severest censors of Fleury, whom he reproached bitterly for having compromised the fair name of France by repudiating his engagements as to the Austrian succession" ("Marie Thérèse," I. p. 207).

The passages (Journal, Rathery, III. pp. 296, 299, 328) upon which this statement is possibly based cannot mean, as the historian would seem to imply, that d'Argenson was in favour of those engagements and opposed to their repudiation. He is merely exclaiming against Fleury because, by his iniquitous acceptance of those engagements, he had been driven to the further iniquity of violating them. D'Argenson, like everybody else, had thought the Pragmatic Sanction preposterous, and no one was more astounded than he at the calm which followed the death of Charles VI. Here is one passage which is chosen from a score:

"Quelle conduite! Tout ne demanderait qu'à aller, animer et fortifier le plus faible, rompre la glace, diviser le grand morceau des États Autrichiens; voilà à quoi nous n'arriverons point, et quelle occasion perdue!" (Journal, Rathery, III. p. 230).

When at last the ice was broken by Frederick, and there is talk of an offensive alliance between France and Prussia, it is true that d'Argenson

recoils; but he is careful to make the reason clear: for he dreads the effect of a war of ambition on the prosperity of the French provinces (Ibid., III. pp. 305, 310). Yet no sooner does the war resume the aspect of a triumphal march than all his old enthusiasm for the dismemberment of the Hapsburg dominion revives (Ibid., III. pp. 342, 344, 409, &c.).

For the whole episode see passages indicated in Appendix C.

D'Argenson's real quarrel with Fleury was (1) that he had subscribed to the Pragmatic Sanction at all; (2) not that he had repudiated it, but that he had neglected to provide himself with a decent excuse for doing so (Ibid., III. pp. 296, 328, &c.).

[267] See pp. 74, 75.

[268] Voltaire, "Correspondance," May 2, 1739, and March 30, 1740 (Garnier, XXXV.).

[269] In speaking of St. Pierre, Journal (Rathery), I. p. 102.

[270] See letter to Fagel, Secretary to the States-General, from Paris, February 25, 1743 ("Lettres et négociations de M. de Van Hoey," pp. 204-10. London, 1745).

[271] Journal (Rathery), III, pp. 105-9.

[272] Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, MS. 6113, fol. 186.

[273] Zevort, p. 131.

[274] "Mémoires du Ministère" (Rathery), IV. pp. 253, 254.

[275] Zevort, p. 133.

[276] "Mémoires du Ministère" (Rathery), IV. p. 257.

[277] Ibid., IV. pp. 248-56.

[278] Ibid., IV. p. 249.

[279] Ibid., IV. p. 250.

[280] Ibid., IV. p. 247.

[281] M. de Broglie represents ("Marie Thérèse," I. pp. 202-4) that d'Argenson's policy involved the abandonment of the allies of France. The grounds for the contention are not quite clear. It would be equally true of Frederick's own recent proposal for an immediate peace (Zevort, p. 131). France at this time actually held sufficient territory to satisfy her allies upon the terms proposed by Frederick ("Mémoires du Ministère," Rathery, IV. p. 258); and she had only to defend it, as d'Argenson said, with foresight and success, to weary her enemies and force upon Maria Theresa conditions of peace which would be acceptable to her allies as well as to herself.

The occurrence of such suggestions is easily explained. M. de Broglie makes no secret of his strong approval of the campaign in Flanders, and of his strong antipathy to Frederick II. In both respects, though in the case of the Flemish campaign he would appear to have no suspicion of it, he is at absolute variance with the French Foreign Minister; and he is consequently constrained to regard him in a spirit which does not conduce to critical appreciation. In the view of the writer, his account of d'Argenson's share in the events of 1745 cannot be taken as even approximately just.

Upon the merits of the rival policies it is not our business to decide. It is sufficient to show that d'Argenson's plans were sound and statesmanlike, and

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that successive disasters were entailed by the failure of the Government to support him.

[282] "Mémoires du Ministère" (Rathery, IV. pp. 257, 258)

[283] Zevort, pp. 135, 136.

[284] Ibid., p. 135.

[285] Ibid., Appendix, p. 349.

[286] Ibid., Appendix, p. 348.

[287] Ibid., Appendix, p. 349.

[288] De Broglie, "Marie Thérèse," I. p. 128.

[289] Ibid., I. p. 129.

[290] Zevort, p. 136.

[291] Ibid, p. 137.

[292] Ibid., Appendix, p. 350.

[293] De Broglie, "Marie Thérèse," I. p. 131.

[294] But three lines appearing in a despatch drafted by him (January 31, 1745. Zevort, Appendix, p. 352) are sufficient to prove what might have been suspected:

"En effet n'en aurions-nous tant fait en faveur de la liberte germanique que pour la revoir tombée dans son ancien esclavage."

Only one hand could have written the word "esclavage."

[295] "Where we should look for the breadth of view and the decision of the statesman, we find but the emotion of a doctrinaire who has attained to office full of confidence in his theories, and who finds himself suddenly thrown into a confused medley of practical complications which he had not even suspected; it is the bewilderment of a solitary who issues from obscurity and is blinded by the unexpected play of light" (De Broglie, "Marie Thérèse," I. p. 208).

Upon this we remark that the above is based upon "the first instructions which he sends after the unforeseen event of Munich;" that that event destroyed a great system, and created what Frederick described as "a terrible crisis"; and that it was just because d'Argenson realised, with a statesman's breadth of view, the appalling consequences either at home or abroad, that he hesitated to take his choice of disasters. When grave issues are so nicely balanced, precipitation is a sign, not of strength, but of weakness.

Frederick, it is true, did not hesitate; and M. de Broglie aptly supplies the reason. A man does not hesitate about the next move when he has no alternative but to throw up the game (De Broglie, "Marie Thérèse," I. p. 219, &c., *cf.* Zevort, pp. 137, 138).

[296] On the evidence of a certain note, M. de Broglie suggests ("Marie Thérèse," I. p. 213) that d'Argenson was by no means at one with the Council, and that he accepted with reluctance a policy which was forced upon him.

The note may be read with equanimity, for it only marks the reappearance of an ideal regret, to be met with occasionally in d'Argenson's Journal—a regret for the policy of merely indirect interference which he sometimes mentions in connection with "un habile homme tel que M. Chauvelin." His

true feeling with regard to the crisis is conveyed by some important words in the note immediately preceding:

"Il en arrivera ce qui pourra, bien, j'espère; *mais pour la paix et un armistice dans le statu quo, il n'y faut plus penser*" (De Broglie, "Marie Thérèse." I. p. 211).

It is admitted that d'Argenson was not the prime mover in the policy of the Council; he looked upon that policy as little short of desperate; but he accepted it as a choice between two evil alternatives; and, as we shall find, he did everything mortal man could do to make it a success.

297 Zevort, Appendix, p. 351.

298 Ibid., pp. 138, 139.

299 Valori, "Mémoires," I. p. 207. "Il me semble que le parti que le roi de Pologne avait à prendre pour sa gloire, sa grandeur, son interêt et celui de sa maison, était en premier lieu de se prêter aux desseins que les rois de France et de Prusse avaient de l'élever à la dignité impériale," &c.

300 Zevort, p. 140.

301 That this was d'Argenson's real attitude is suggested by a multitude of minute hints to be found in nearly all the available documents. It is the only attitude consistent with his known opinions and with his subsequent conduct.

302 Zevort, p. 139.

303 Ibid, p. 140.

304 Had Frederick imagined for a moment that Valori's mission had the slightest prospect of success, his action as regards both France and Saxony might have changed in a very startling fashion. Every principle of policy would have engaged him to withstand the elevation of Augustus to the Empire.

305 De Broglie, "Marie Thérèse," I. p. 228.

306 M. de Broglie is perhaps a little premature in describing this as "the beginning of the old game" ("Marie Thérèse," I. pp. 219, 220). Frederick, with the knowledge and concurrence of the French Government (Zevort, p. 142), was already in communication with England; he had not yet heard the intentions of France; he could have no assurance that she meant to prosecute the war; and thinking his position perilous, he took immediate steps to extricate himself with as little loss as possible. Allowing time for the courier to travel from Munich to Berlin, it is clear that these instructions were despatched within a couple of days after the news of the Emperor's death first reached him. Certainly it was a scuttling policy; and there is no reason to suppose it would have been pursued had the war policy of France been loyally supported.

307 De Broglie, "Marie Thérèse," I. p. 280.

308 Zevort, pp. 137, 138.

309 In the French despatch of January 31: see p. 110.

310 Zevort, pp. 138, 141, 142, 145, 146. Appendix, pp. 254-7, 257-9.

311 See p. 104.

312 The memoir is neglected by M. Zevort. It is noticed by M. de Broglie

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("Marie Thérèse," I. p. 202, note) and rejected as possibly spurious and certainly unimportant. His principal reason is that he has not been able to find it among the ordinary sources, or to discover any reference to it by d'Argenson himself.

The writer believes that there is ample evidence to show where it might have been found; and also that, by M. de Broglie's own criterion, it should be one of the most important records of the time. The evidence is such as the historian, upon his own admission, would probably accept as conclusive. It is the critical question of d'Argenson's ministry, and is dealt with fully in Appendix A.

313 D'Argenson became minister on November 18, 1744. The note of time given by Flassan is "au mois de février" (1745). From the references to the hesitation of the King of Poland, it may perhaps be placed immediately after the reception of Valori's first letters from Dresden, February 17 (Zevort, p. 140).

314 Apart from the policy set forth in it, this memoir contains some important critical suggestions:

(*a*) The minister's determination to maintain Frederick in Silesia.

(*b*) His conception of peace as the primary object to which all others must contribute.

(*c*) His perfect knowledge of the real conditions of his negotiations with Augustus. It throws a new light upon the desperate persistency with which he tried to win over the Court of Dresden.

315 Flassan, "Histoire de la Diplomatie Française," V. pp. 242–5.

316 Zevort, Appendix, pp. 254–7.

317 Ibid., p. 257.

318 Ibid., Appendix, p. 361.

319 At the end of April, when he had been pressing the negotiation for three months, d'Argenson had absolutely no faith in its success. See a very significant passage in Zevort, p. 280, which throws a light more than usually clear upon d'Argenson's view of his own position.

320 Zevort, Appendix, p. 362.

321 *Cf.* Zevort, p. 143, where d'Argenson is quoted as saying in March: "La sagesse et l'honneur veulent que nous soutenions le roi de Prusse avec toute l'ardeur la plus grande que nous ayons jamais embrassée aucune vue d'État."

322 Ibid., p. 145.

323 De Broglie, "Marie Thérèse," I. p. 311.

324 Ibid., I. p. 131.

325 Ibid., I. pp. 290–3.

326 Zevort, p. 145.

327 De Broglie, "Marie Thérèse," I. p. 303.

328 Ibid., I. pp. 307–13.

329 Ibid., I. p. 317.

330 Ibid., I. p. 313.

331 Zevort, pp. 144, 154.

332 De Broglie, "Marie Thérèse," I. p. 309.

333 Zevort, Appendix, p. 364, Frederick to Louis XV., May 2, 1745.

334 Zevort, Appendix, p. 366, Memoir of Frederick, May 16.

335 Ibid., Appendix, p. 367.

336 Ibid., Appendix, p. 364.

337 See p. 110.

338 De Broglie, "Marie Thérèse," II. p. 58.

339 Ibid., II. p. 90.

340 Ibid., II., p. 93.

341 Zevort, Appendix, p. 368.

342 De Broglie, "Marie Thérèse," II. pp. 102-29.

343 Ibid., II. pp. 130-42.

344 Ibid., II. p. 144.

345 Ibid., II. pp. 196, 197.

346 Ibid., II. pp. 188, 189.

347 As an example of the straits to which d'Argenson was reduced through the failure of the French Government to support his policy, we may cite some remarks of his to the French representative at Frankfort in reference to the retreat of Conti.

"It appears that the King of Poland, having always regarded the continuance of the French army in the neighbourhood of Frankfort as an obstacle to the success of the views which he has formed from the beginning in regard to the imperial crown, is on the point of declaring himself a candidate."

It is absurd to suppose that d'Argenson really meant this, or looked upon the retreat as a subject of congratulation. It was simply one of the kaleidoscopic movements by which events, affected as they were by successive disasters, might still be made to look beautiful.

The resource, perhaps, was a little ridiculous; but it is hard to see what he would have done without it.

348 De Broglie, "Marie Thérèse," Appendix, II. pp. 407, 408.

349 Ibid., II. p. 195.

350 Ibid , II. p. 201.

351 Ibid., II. p. 223.

352 Ibid., I. p. 261.

353 Ibid., II. p. 340.

354 With this compare Zevort, p. 105, where d'Argenson is made the prime mover in measures which M. de Broglie proves he was deliberately doing his utmost to frustrate.

355 De Broglie, "Marie Thérèse," II. p. 341.

356 Ibid., II. p. 342.

357 Ibid., II. p. 298, &c.

358 Ibid., II. p. 352.

359 Ibid., II. p. 354, and Appendix, 410–13.

360 Ibid., II. Appendix, pp. 408, 409. Reading this letter in the light of d'Argenson's general policy and of subsequent events, it is hard to find in it "the proof of the strange illusions by which d'Argenson was possessed" (Ibid., Appendix, II. p. 407).

361 Ibid., II. p. 391.

362-73

362 The principal authorities are: Zevort, "Le Ministère"; de Broglie, "Maurice de Saxe et le Marquis d'Argenson"; and d'Argenson, "Mémoires du Ministère" (Rathery, IV. and V.). Henceforth the references need not be given in detail.

363 In particular, M. de Broglie's account becomes as excellent as it formerly seemed to be exceptionable. He is no longer fretted by d'Argenson's anti-Austrian policy.

364 Even in one of the Balleroy letters he speaks of "une méchante confédération comme celle d'Italie"; and his ideal of Italian independence was inspired, partly at least, by the man who had introduced him to the study of foreign politics, the fallen minister Chauvelin.

365 Journal (Rathery), II., III., *passim*.

366 Champeaux, at this time agent at Geneva, was a friend of d'Argenson, and one of his old companions at the Entresol.

367 The hope was perhaps suggested by Voltaire (de Broglie), who had sent to the Minister the few cheering words he received during the storm created by the disaster. The poet was in busy correspondence with d'Argenson, and upon documents demanding elegance and finish his accomplished pen was frequently employed.

368 This account of Maurice's share in the incident is derived mainly from Count Vitzthum d'Eckstaedt's work, "Maurice de Saxe et Marie Josephe," 1867.

369 Brühl to Saxe, November 16, 1746: Vitzthum, p. 93. Maurice's letters give some interesting glimpses of d'Argenson; *e.g.*, he describes him to his brother, the King of Poland, as a man "not at all easy to govern" (p. 95), and again to the Queen as "a kind of bear" (p. 101). He tells Brühl that d'Argenson is "so 'bête' that the King [Louis XV.] is ashamed of him" (p. 109).

370 Vitzthum, p. 110.

371 In certain letters of doubtful authority, the ill-feeling is accounted for by the suggestion that Maria Theresa was corresponding with Madame de Pompadour, and that d'Argenson had intercepted the letters ("Correspondance sur la cour de Louis XV." Gaçon-Dufour, Paris. 1808).

372 See "Correspondance de Louis XV. et le Maréchal de Noailles," ed. Camille Rousset. The Madame de Chatelus mentioned by Noailles was the lady to whom d'Argenson had been attached for sixteen years. He has left a rather striking description of her (see Journal, under date 1728). They occupied adjoining houses in the Rue de Gros Chenet, some drawings of which are to be found among d'Argenson's sketches (Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, MS. 6164).

373 M. Vitzthum d'Eckstaedt concludes his account as follows:

"It was not for general incapacity that the Marquis d'Argenson was dismissed, nor for having forgotten one day to open the despatches from Genoa. It was because he was obstinately attached to a false policy, to a policy disapproved by Maurice de Saxe, who at this moment was governing France" (p. 152).

374 "Le système des ridicules poursuit de même le ministre des affaires étrangères, qui, estimant peu les courtisans, est très reservé avec eux. Ces messieurs, pour le distinguer de son frère, l'appellent 'd'Argenson le Bête.' Les gens honnêtes ont nommé le ministre de la guerre 'd'Argenson l'intrigant'" ("Correspondance," Gaçon-Dufour, p. 90).

These letters are far from reflecting the very poor opinion of d'Argenson which is said to have been prevalent at Court. Such may have been the opinion of his political rivals and of the circle of Madame de Pompadour, to which d'Argenson, in person and principle, was consistently opposed. It might well have acquired the substance of a tradition, and have affected later criticism unduly.

375 It is necessary to grasp this point if we are to avoid a frequent prejudice against d'Argenson, a prejudice which arises from regarding him as a man of very large pretensions and of very inadequate performance. There is no good ground for believing in his utter failure, or consequently in the hollowness of his pretensions.

376 Perhaps it is necessary to reinforce this point. It is to be remembered that in any acutely critical period, wisdom is a matter of months or weeks. Never even for seven days can opinion safely be divorced from circumstance. It is quite true that a general view of the relations of France with the German powers during the last century and a half suggests that at the time with which we are concerned her traditional anti-Austrian policy was tending to become an anachronism; but we must be careful about making that general view the basis of particular conclusions. The available documents prove conclusively that whenever that tendency began to approach perceptibility and power, it was never in the course of d'Argenson's ministry, still less during the critical year 1745.

In and throughout that year France had but one competitor on the continent—Austria. The position of Prussia—if in connection with France and Austria we may assign her the dignity of a position—was in the highest degree precarious. No one knew it better than the Prussian king himself. There was probably not a moment in the course of the year when he did not feel himself to be within an ace of destruction; not an episode but betrays his anxiety for escape with honour. His efforts for peace in January; his desperate overtures at London after the death of the Emperor; his earnest, eloquent entreaties to maintain the Elector of Bavaria and the Prince of Conti; his dull bitterness and despair at the Convention of Augsburg and the withdrawal of the French from Germany; his continued pressure upon England, ending in the Treaty of Hanover; finally, his studious moderation when he appeared as a conqueror in Dresden; all point to but one conclusion. His position was, and he knew it be, desperate; and it was only the headlong courage of desperation that enabled him to see the year out safely.

The definitive rise of Prussia is probably to be dated from the Peace of Dresden, and not one moment before. Moreover it cannot have been immediately apparent. One year after the treaty of peace d'Argenson fell; and during that year Prussia was recovering from the effects of the war, and her ambi-

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tions and prospective power can have been present to the mind of Frederick alone. At what particular period her advance must have become sufficiently evident to affect the views of statesmen, only a profound study of that single question can disclose. Certain it is that it cannot have been at any period during d'Argenson's ministry, or more especially during the year 1745.

The truth of the matter appears to be this. Events were rapidly tending towards, though they had not yet reached, a condition of which d'Argenson had often dreamed. Prussia, if her power developed, might one day be strong enough to stand alone against the Austrian House; and France would be free to watch the contest, and might leave the rivals to ruin each other. But this was still in the future; and the time was yet apparently distant when a responsible French minister could entertain the idea of an Austrian alliance.

It is true that there was already an Austrian party in the Council; there is always such a party in any council. There are men who cannot resist the fascination of cheap success, who are devoted to a policy of ease with honour. They are not prominent in the ranks of statesmen.

377 "Un grand homme qui manque" (De Broglie, "Marie Thérèse," II. Appendix, p. 2).

378 The aspiration was not so absurd as it might seem. Could d'Argenson have acquired, by long acquaintance with affairs, that practical aptitude which his brother possessed, he might have been one of the greatest among men. He had a range of mind and a depth of character to which Count d'Argenson could lay no claim.

379 Journal (Rathery), V. p. 142.

380 Ibid., V. p. 314. December, 1748.

381 The best account of the whole movement is to be found in Felix Rocquain, "L'esprit révolutionnaire avant la révolution."

382 "La Philosophie."

383 Journal (Rathery), VI. p. 201, *cf.* Ibid., VI. p. 208. The sentence displays his frequent disregard of syntax in directness and force of expression.

384 Ibid., VII. p. 199. April, 1752.

385 Ibid., VI. p. 320. December, 1750.

386 Ibid., VII. p. 23. November, 1751.

387 Ibid., VII. p. 294. September, 1752.

388 Ibid., VIII. p. 315. June, 1754.

389 Ibid., VI. p. 26. August, 1749.

390 Ibid., VI. p. 81. December, 1749.

391 Ibid., VI. p. 390. April, 1751.

392 Ibid., VII. p. 457. April, 1753.

393 Ibid., VIII. p. 60. June, 1753.

394 Ibid., VII. p. 106., *cf.* Ibid., 110, 111. February, 1752.

395 The "Considérations." See Chap. VI.

396 The "advanced" views privately held among the wealthier clergy are well known. On hearing of a diocesan sermon on the subject of "infidelity,"

d'Argenson observes that it is an absurd theme upon which to preach to the clergy of France. It was very necessary, however.

397 D'Argenson did not disguise his sympathy with the "philosophers." When the Abbé de Prades was fleeing the country he took refuge in the neighbourhood of d'Argenson's château; and the latter wrote to his powerful brother to intercede for the indiscreet ecclesiastic (Journal, Rathery, VII. p. 57, note). D'Argenson was naturally proud too of his friendship with d'Alembert.

398 Journal (Rathery), VII. p. 424. March, 1753.

399 D'Argenson had a personal reason for ill-feeling against the Sorbonne. It proposed to condemn a "Histoire du droit public ecclésiastique français," published (1737) in two large quarto volumes by a Jesuit, de la Motte. It was based upon some papers which had been read by d'Argenson before the Entresol (Journal, Rathery, VI. p. 168), and afterwards given as an act of charity to la Motte, who was one of d'Argenson's old masters at the Collège Louis-le-Grand. The book was published without d'Argenson's sanction, but his share in the work was pretty generally known—far too generally for his peace of mind. *Cf.* p. 57.

400 Journal (Rathery), VIII. p. 289. May, 1754.

401 "Les deux philosophies."

402 Journal (Rathery), VIII. p. 291.

403 References to what appear to be the most important passages bearing on the great public questions of the time are given in Appendix D.

404 As a brief and excellent example, we may take a criticism of sinking funds which English statesmen might have read with advantage:—

"Ces rentes tournantes qu'a introduites ici Duverney, à l'imitation de l'Angleterre, sont des précautions que le maître prend contre le maître; emprunteur, il fait impôt, et destine tous les ans une partie de cet impôt pour rembourser; par là il charge davantage ses finances et ses peuples tout à la fois; et, comme il ne dépense pas avec moins de facilité et de légèreté, il charge toujours davantage et les maltôtes ne cessent plus. *Un prince sage devrait prendre le fond d'amortissement sur ses épargnes seules*" (Journal, Rathery, V. p. 442).

D'Argenson's ideas on economics are marked by his usual acuteness and independence. He was not a member of the physiocratic school; and though he joined the Economists in deploring the sacrifice of agriculture to manufacturing industry, he did not share their peculiar views as to the exclusive value of land. He was one of the earliest and soundest of Free Traders, maintaining that commerce should not be interfered with except for purely fiscal purposes.

405 See his sketches of Segrez in the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, MS. 6164.

406 Journal (édit. Jannet), V. p. 245.

407 Journal (Rathery), VI. p. 57.

408 "L'esprit public," p. 231.

409 Journal (Rathery), VI. p. 182. "Quoi qu'il n'y ait rien que de vertueux dans ce petit roman anglais."

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410 In January, 1747, d'Argenson was nominated by the King President of the "Académie des Inscriptions et des Belles-Lettres" (Journal, Rathery, V. p. 349). He gives an amusing account of his original election (Journal, Rathery, I. pp. 165–75). The only contribution of his we have been able to discover in the Journals of the Academy is a paper on French historians and the writing of history (XXVIII. pp. 626–46).

411 Journal (Rathery), VI. p. 197. May 2, 1750.

412 See Scherer, "Études," vol. III.

413 Of M. Aubertin's notice ("L'esprit public") it is but little to say that it is by far the ablest criticism of d'Argenson at present existing. It is presumption even to praise a work so admirably performed. It presents one or two features which one may do oneself the honour to note.

(*a*) M. Aubertin seems to accept a little too readily the idea of d'Argenson's practical incapacity. He has not of course examined the events of his ministry.

(*b*) He regrets that d'Argenson should have occupied himself with his practical ambitions, instead of confining himself to the region of Speculation. It seems clear that to a man of d'Argenson's temperament, speculative was dependent on practical activity; and that had he resigned himself to be a mere thinker, his power as a thinker would have been destroyed completely. We have to accept d'Argenson upon his own terms as a practical reformer before we can hope to do him justice.

414 Note to the "Contrat Social" (Book iv.).

415 Both editions were afterwards reprinted.

416 Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, MSS. 2334, 2335, 2337, and 2338.

417 Other notable features of the scheme are :—

(*a*) Principles of taxation. Total exemption for raw materials; light taxes upon permanent stock and plant; the burden of taxation to fall upon articles of consumption (Article XV.).

(*b*) Distribution of Revenue. Three-fourths of all revenue to go to the Government, one-fourth to be retained for local purposes (Article XV.).

(*c*) The reduction of the Intendancies, to an extent "smaller than the present 'Généralités'"; if the present reduction succeeds, it may proceed further, until the Intendancy shall comprise no more than two hundred parishes, and the Sub-delegacy no more than twenty.

(*d*) The Intendant shall retain a single post no longer than three years; by this means he will be prevented from establishing local connections to the prejudice of the public service, and be inspired to exert what ability he possesses by the hope of obtaining a more lucrative place.

418 We have to guard against confounding d'Argenson's philosophical disquisitions with his definite project of reform. He held himself bound to establish principles as well as to formulate proposals, and he expressly declares that the writer of such a work as his must seek the counsels of perfection, however distant they may seem at the moment from the realm of practical politics. And herein is d'Argenson's greatness as a political

thinker, that he never fails to see, or to see the distinction between, what is best in principle and what is possible in practice.

Thus, he denounces the "pernicious system" of the traffic in judicial positions; but in his definite Plan of 1764 (1737) he says not a word of it, owing to the practical difficulty of reimbursing those whose interests would be sacrificed to the reform. He goes no further than to provide, in Article 51, against the growth of the abuse in connection with the new municipal offices which he proposes to create. In course of time however he became convinced that the nation would be benefitted, and that funds might be raised for compensating office-holders, by the sale of the Crown lands; and accordingly in the Plan of 1784 (1755), the practical difficulty being overcome, the "pernicious system," untouched by the project of 1764 (1737), is swept away at a stroke.

Again, as to the nobility. It is true that in Chapter VIII. Article 2, pp. 305-8 [1764 (1737)], d'Argenson formulates certain objections to the principle of a hereditary noble class; and further, that he dilates elsewhere upon the harm done by the survival of the vexatious feudal privileges exacted by the noblesse. Yet in his definite Plan he neither touches the nobility as a class, nor does he lay a finger upon any of the privileges pertaining to it. On the contrary, the continuance of the seigneurial jurisdictions, which are deliberately abolished in the later scheme of 1784 (1755), is incidentally recognised, p. 221 (1764).

The facts with regard to the three classes mentioned by M. Martin may be stated as follows:—

(*a*) The bureaucracy.

By the Plan of 1764 (1737) the ministry, the administrative councils, the Intendants, the Sub-delegates, in a word, the great standing bureaucratic organisation, was to continue intact. It was even strengthened. It is true that in the scheme of 1784 (1755) its lower ranks were relaxed; but with that scheme we are not concerned, as it is not noticed by M. Martin.

(*b*) The judicial aristocracy.

By neither of d'Argenson's Plans was the existence of the judicial aristocracies affected in the least. In that of 1764 (1737) the functions of the Parlements are even extended (Article 42). It is true that he attacks the system of purchase upon which the Companies were organised; but that system is untouched by the earlier Plan, and is only abolished [in 178 (1755)] when means have been found of replacing it, and of compensating those who were subjected to forfeiture.

(*c*) The noblesse.

Under the scheme of 1764 (1737) the nobility had nothing to fear. Their privileges, even those which d'Argenson disliked most strongly, are maintained intact. It is only in the Plan of 1784 (1755) that the high seigneurial jurisdictions are suppressed, and that the nobles are made to share with the roturiers in the ordinary burdens of the state. Even then their honorary distinctions are scrupulously conserved; the more powerful of them are created Peers of their several Provinces; and express provision is made for the continued magnificence of the Royal Household.

As to the destruction of the nobility, nothing could have been further from

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d'Argenson's mind. He was himself a nobleman; and, if he had none of the prejudice, he had all the pride of his class. He advocates the suppression of old feudal privileges in the belief that they can be regretted by none but those whose devotion to the dignity of their order amounts to madness, "jusqu'à la folie" [p. 126 (1784)]. He repudiates the intention of debasing an aristocracy; in his own words, "il n'est question que d'extirper une satrapie roturière et odieuse" [p. 312 (1764)]. His only quarrel is with the nobleman's claims to "le droit de chasse sur ses voisins, source de querelles et d'insultes; les droits considérables de mutation et de reliefs en cas de vente et même de succession collatérale, par où les terres mal administrées passent plus difficilement dans des mains qui les cultiveroient mieux; l'exercice de la justice seigneuriale négligé partout et pratiqué par une race de gens avides, toujours occupés à exciter l'habitant simple à plaider; enfin tous ces différens droits, procés, chicanes, vieilles recherches, empêchement à la bonne culture des terres, rétrécissement de l'abondance, obstacle au bonheur de la campagne" [pp. 120-21 (1784), *cf.* pp. 119-20 (1764)]. These d'Argenson would have swept away; and in doing so he would have reduced the French nobility, or rather he would have raised it, to the position actually occupied by one of the most powerful aristocracies in the world, the nobility of England.

No more cruelly keen-sighted man than d'Argenson ever lived. He only differs from most men of equal vision in that his clear perception of life as it was did not breed in him disgust and cynical acceptance. His mind could command two worlds, the real and the ideal; but only intimate knowledge can follow him at will into either, or avoid the critical gaucherie of mistaking aspiration for illusion.

419 Perhaps one source of obscurity is d'Argenson's unhappy title. By "la démocratie" he means, not "democracy," but "the democratic element." He was early taken to task for this ambiguity of phrase. Bound up with one of the manuscripts in the Arsenal are half-a-dozen sheets of criticism returned to d'Argenson by St. Pierre in the spring of 1738. St. Pierre begins by saying that democracy is a form of government in which the final voice on public questions rests with the majority of the people, and that the author has really no right to speak of "democracy" in connection with his scheme. Attached to these sheets is a pretty little letter, which is interesting enough to reproduce.

"Mardi, 8 avril, 1738, au Palais Roial.

"M. de Fontenelle a lu plusieurs chapitres du manuscrit; il panse comme vous sur les elexions des officiers municipaux, et trouve que sans y panser vous parlez fort eloquemment et fortement, et souvent avec des alluzions très justes et très gracieuses.

"Pour moi, je panse aussi très souvent comme vous, et que vous pouvez aller loin si vous continuez à méditer et à écrire.

"Vous verrez dans le petit cahier (above referred to) les observations que j'ai faites en lizant votre manuscrit, que je vous invite à perfexionner de plus en plus; et surtout à l'accusation de notre extrême indolence sur la pernicieuse métode de la vénalité des emplois publics.

"M. de Fontenelle croit que M. d'Aube serait bien aize de lire votre manuscrit; il en est digne, et est de vos amis; il écrit aussi sur quelques matières de gouvernement.

"C'est à vous de juger de mes observations, at à les rectifier.

"L'Abé de St. Pierre."

420 Voltaire to d'Argenson, June 21, 1739 (Garnier). In speaking of this letter, M. de Broglie represents that Voltaire regarded d'Argenson's book merely as the lucubration of an influential fool, and that his congratulations and criticism were utterly insincere ("Marie Thérèse," I. pp. 187-90).

The origin of this, at first sight, astonishing suggestion is not very hard to discover. The historian happened to have read the "Considérations" in the edition of 1784. Unaware of the divergencies between the two editions, he of course assumed that it was the Plan published in 1784 in reference to which Voltaire was writing; and failing very naturally to understand how, in regard to it, Voltaire could have meant what he said, was driven to suggest that he said what he did not mean; that, in short, Voltaire thought d'Argenson a fool, and chose to flatter him for his own purposes.

This is a grave imputation upon both men; and the grounds for it disappear entirely when Voltaire's letters are read in connection with the Plan of 1764 (1737), of which he was actually writing. His meaning at once becomes natural and clear. D'Argenson had been arguing against over-centralisation, and had advocated the introduction of local government upon a very modest scale. Voltaire replies that a system not dissimilar in effect, was already at work in England; that there local affairs proceeded without the intervention of a Council of State; and that the law-abiding character of the English people was largely due to their habit of local self-government. The argument is quite clear, and is simply destroyed by equivocal interpretation.

Voltaire's feeling on receiving the book was one of keen surprise and warm admiration. For months afterwards his letters are witness to the impression it produced upon him. So cordial and frank are they that it was at first difficult to conceive by what process the idea of insincerity could have been fathered upon them.

Had Voltaire really written in such a spirit, not only his reputation as a critic but his honour as a man would have suffered very gravely. For months past d'Argenson had been straining every nerve to defend him from "the literary police;" and to have written to his protector as the historian suggests, would have been an act of black dishonour. It is true that there were men before whom Voltaire could abase and debase himself; but d'Argenson the philosophe, his old school friend, was not one of them. With the exception of Count d'Argental, there is not one of his correspondents to whom Voltaire writes with such openness and freedom.

421 Voltaire to d'Argenson, May 8, 1739 (Garnier).

422 "Ce Traité de Politique a esté composé à l'occasion de ceux de M. de Boulainvilliers, touchant l'ancien gouvernement féodal de la France, 1737" (title-page of manuscripts in the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal).

423 "Considérations," edition of 1764, article 41.

424–36

424 See "Considérations," p. 189 (1764).

425 Voltaire to d'Argenson, July 28, 1739 (Garnier).

426 So far as is known to the writer, the only full account of it is that of M. de Broglie ("Marie Thérèse," I. pp. 187–90), which is open to grave objection. The scheme is not noticed by, or apparently known to, M. Martin ("Histoire de France"), who examines the Plan of 1764 (1737).

427 This article pourtrays in brief the spirit of the whole scheme.

428 *I.e.*, each district receiver.

429 De Broglie, "Marie Thérèse," I. chap. ii. § 2.

430 See pp. 156–66.

431 See p. 182–3.

432 See Martin, "Histoire de France," XVI.

433 See Plan (above), article XI. There were four from each of the Estates and they had no common organisation.

434 The popular attacks (see Chap. V.) were directed against the person of the monarch and the ministers. The tradition of the monarchy survived the disasters of the Seven Years' War, and only began to crumble with the dismissal of Turgot. The danger to it threatened by the popular attacks was only understood by a few men like d'Argenson.

435 And this wise man knew it. He writes in March, 1756 :—

"Cependant le Roi est très mal conseillé; il se donne toujours tort et donne toujours raison au parlement. On le dégrade peu à peu, surtout dans le siècle lumineux et philosophique où nous vivons. Si Henri III. fut obligé de se mettre à la tête de la Ligue, Louis XV. devrait se mettre à la tête de la philosophie, de la justice et de la raison pour rétablir son pouvoir et son bonheur; qu'il se constitue hardiment le chef des réformateurs de l'État pour conduire mieux qu'eux les réparations que demande la situation de la France" (Journal, Rathery, IX. p. 222).

436 See one of her thrice delightful letters to the Comtesse de Baschi ("Lettres de Madame de Pompadour," I. pp. 71–6. Owen. London, 1771).

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